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THE LICHFIELD CIRCLE AND FEMALE EDUCATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the attitudes of the Lichfield Circle toward female education as it was practiced in eighteenth century England. Of particular importance to the scope of the work is a detailed discussion of the general attitudes of the members of the Lichfield Circle relating to the nature of women.

The introductory chapter to the six-part work provides a brief of the intent of the research and defines its chronological and topical parameters.

Chapter two introduces the members of the Lichfield Circle, and attempts to provide a context for the rest of the work by including a description of the eighteenth century political and social climate. An important feature of this discussion is the progressive views of the group politically. The legal, economic, and social position of the eighteenth century middle or upper class female is discussed as part of the context for the research.

Because the educational philosophy of the Lichfield Circle was directly derived from their perceptions of the nature of women - physically, intellectually and affectively - these are discussed

in detail in the third chapter. As adherents of Rousseau, the Lichfield Circle expressed a belief in the necessity for a separation of roles dependent on gender, as dictated by Nature. Included as part of the discussion concerning the nature of women, is an attempt to analyse the ambivalence of the Lichfield Circle toward women and their appropriate role in a society experiencing an evolution of the family and familial relationships.

Chapters four and five present the educational philosophy of the Lichfield Circle as it related to female education, whether carried out in the home or in the eighteenth female boarding school. The thesis presents the view that by criticising the commonly accepted pattern of female education consisting of the social accomplishments, and demanding a more rigorously academic education for girls, the Lichfield Circle were leaders for their day in the field of pedagogical theory and methodology.

In Chapter six a brief summary is provided, and some conclusions to the research are presented. In particular there is some effort to explain the Circle's ambivalence toward women's role as not necessarily contradictory relating to their political progressivism, particularly taking into account the conservative nature of England in the 1790's and the evolutionary style of change in familial relationships.

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

The Lichfield Circle consisted of a small coterie of intellectuals, their influential friends and associates who inhabited the area around the town of Lichfield, England from the middle to the late eighteenth century. This thesis will serve to present the views and attitudes of this group toward women in general and to female education in particular.

The eighteenth century is a most interesting era for any student of history, for during the span of that century England was transformed from an agrarian society to that of an emerging industrial nation. Sweeping changes (economical, political, social and intellectual) heralded the arrival of the modern age for Britain. The ideas and work of the Lichfield Circle are set against the backdrop of this dynamic period of history.

The increasing importance socially and economically of the middle class in the eighteenth century gave rise to the increased demand for and resulting availability of education. While Locke and Rousseau helped develop the attitudes of the eighteenth century toward childhood on a theoretical level, it was the increasingly affluent middle class which popularised by the end of the eighteenth century, the demand for the education of its children. This had given rise to an enormous amount of literature written concerning education. Research into the works of the Lichfield Circle provides a means by which to observe from another century the cut and thrust of written debate between the various intellectual groups of the eighteenth century, and perhaps to understand more fully some of our present-day attitudes toward the nature of women.

The work undertaken here will attempt to view the Lichfield Circle from within the context of their own time. The eighteenth century was the seedbed for a veritable jungle of opposing views and philosophies. The Lichfield Circle represented only one of a number of philosophical styles which abandoned the yoke of Old World thought processes.

Theoretically, the Lichfield Circle fitted well into the free-thinking realm. Certainly, they questioned some of their society's values; after all, they were in some respects followers of Rousseau, whose Social Contract envisioned a totally new societal structure. It remains to be seen, however, if this radical, free-thinking, questioning approach extended to the Lichfield Circle's attitudes towards women and female education.

Further justification for this work can be found in the fact that, although much has been written on eighteenth century education in general and female education in particular, very little has been written about the views of the Lichfield Circle. Although its members are generally credited with popularising the ideas of Rousseau concerning childhood and his notions of natural education, the Circle is rarely given more than a passing mention, if any at all, in books on the history of education.

For example, in Christopher J. Lucas′ Our Western Educational Heritage, although Rousseau is discussed in some length and Naturalism is credited with significant advances in educational theory, the Lichfield Circle is mentioned not at all. In A History of Western Education H.G. Good makes passing mention of Maria Edgeworth only in her capacity as writer of children′s stories, completely ignoring her contributory efforts towards the field of education. [1] A.V. Judges, editor of Pioneers of English Education, devotes a chapter to the work of Jeremy Bentham, the Utilitarian contemporary of Edgeworth and company, yet provides only the merest mention of the work of the Lichfield Circle. From this omission it would be possible to assume that the views of the Naturalists, like those of the Edgeworths, were held in less esteem than those of the Utilitarians in the eighteenth century. This assumption would not be true for, in fact, the Naturalist theories on education and childhood were very popular indeed.

This tendency for histories of education to omit this group has not, fortunately, been total. W.A.C. Stewart, in Progressives and Radicals in English Education 1750-1970, although referring only briefly to the Lichfield group, at least does give them credit for "the stream of thought from the European Enlightenment and Romanticism of Rousseau, which flowed more or less directly into English schools through... Day and the Edgeworths." [2] In this work, Thomas Day is treated somewhat separately from the Edgeworths upon whom authors tend to concentrate. H.C. Barnard in A History of English Education from 1760 also credits the Lichfield Group with popularising the work of Rousseau in England, but again in a most brief mention.

The references cited above may be forgiven to some extent for the omission of a group who was very popular in their time, and whose works in the field of education were held in some esteem; they are, after all, histories of education of a general nature, not dealing more exclusively with the field of female education. As one narrows the parameters to this more defined field of enquiry, one might expect to see the works of the Lichfield Circle included to a much greater extent.

A perusal of five works on the history of female education reveals that the work of members of the Lichfield Circle are mentioned in only two. Phyllis Stock in Better Than Rubies makes no mention of any member of the group other than a one-line reference to Erasmus Darwin for his work on the improvement of female boarding schools. In her work Women in Education, Patricia Sexton discusses the role of education in the Enlightenment, but focusses only on the views of Fenelon and Bennett.

In Willingly to School, Mary Cathcart Borer concentrates on the history of English female education from the Norman Conquest to the present, and with this more narrowly defined topic, one would certainly expect to see some treatment of the work of the English naturalists. However, again there is only a one-line reference to the work of Darwin, [3] and a scant two pages on the life and work of Thomas Day, [4] in his capacity as disciple of Rousseau.

There is a good description of boarding school life in Dorothy Gardiner's English Girlhood at School, much of the information being drawn from the school of the Miss Parkers, the illegitimate daughters of Erasmus Darwin. As a basis for their school, Gardiner credits

Darwin's work A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools. [5] Gardiner also includes some references to the rather eccentric lifestyle of Thomas Day.

Josephine Kamm, in Hope Deferred, also treats the group with more attention; however, again the references in this work are to the members of the group as individuals.

Although both Gardiner's and Kamm's works are fairly narrowly defined in their choice of topic, neither book attempts to deal in any length with the contributions of the members of the Lichfield Circle. Where the group is mentioned, it is as individual members; nowhere has the writer been able to find a reference to their efforts as a group, or to any singularity of purpose or opinion.

One might also mention that particularly in the case of Gardiner's and Kamm's books, the attention paid to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft is much more detailed, although her works concerning female education were no more detailed or numerous than those of the Lichfield group. This perhaps poses an interesting question concerning the reasons why the work of the Lichfield Circle has all but been ignored in the tracing of female education in England. Either their efforts were of an insignificant nature, or their views have been eclipsed by those of the radical-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay Graham. It is possible that the feminist movement has focussed so totally upon the work of these radical-feminists that the efforts of others more conservative in nature have all but been forgotten in the historiography of female education.

The above brief review of literature is included here to provide justification for the work undertaken in this thesis. Because reference to the work of the Lichfield Circle is scanty at best, and to their work as a group (including the educational ideas of members such as Beddoes and Priestley) next to non-existent, it is hoped that this research into the Lichfield Circle and their interesting views concerning women and female education will help fill the void.

It is necessary in any work of this nature to limit the scope chronologically. In this case the years 1770 to 1820 have been chosen. The members of the group centred in the Lichfield area between 1769 and 1785. It was during these years that the initial bonds were made between members of the group. Although Erasmus Darwin had settled in the Lichfield area in 1756, it was not until 1769 that Richard Lovell Edgeworth came to the area, whereupon a friendship and association was begun which was to form the nucleus of this group.

Dr. Darwin left Lichfield in 1781 after his second marriage and relocated in Derby. However, the bonds of friendship and mutual interest in science and education still held the group together, and although many members of the group wrote long after their period of tenure in Lichfield, their time together in that town was crucial in crystallising their views.

The choice of 1820 as a convenient date for closing the main thrust of the study has been made because it encompasses many of the works of Maria, the daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Maria represents a second generation, as she was not a contemporary of the original group. Although references to Maria Edgeworth's works dating to 1820 (and occasionally even beyond) may appear to elongate the time period of activity of the Lichfield Circle, this must not be assumed. All members of the original group had died by 1820, for they were, for the most part, an eighteenth century phenomenon. Although she lived into the mid-nineteenth century, for the purposes of this work Maria will be included as a member of the group because of her collaboration with her father on the seminal Essays on Practical Education and the completion of his Memoirs after his death in 1817.

The close relationship between Maria and her father can be seen in her many children's stories and in her private correspondence. Her admiration for Richard Lovell Edgeworth as well as her love for and interest in his empirical approach to the education of children make her an invaluable member of the group. Her prolific work in children's literature provides ample written evidence of the opinions of the group concerning the nature and place of women in that society, and the best kind of education which could be offered them.

Because of the dearth of reference material documenting the work of this group of educationists, sources for this research will be more often primary than secondary. Central to the focus of the thesis will be Richard Lovell Edgeworth's Practical Education (1798), co-authored by his daughter Maria. This work provides a well-organised presentation of the essence of the English response to Rousseau's "natural education".

Of major importance to the theme of female education are Erasmus Darwin's A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools (1797) and Joseph Priestley's Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education (1778). Dr. Thomas Beddoes' primary work, Hygeia, Essays Moral and Medical (1806) concerns female health and provides an excellent view of the naturalists´ conceptualisation of women and their place in society as dictated by Nature, from which an appropriate education must be evolved.

Certainly the most prolific writer of the group was Maria Edgeworth. It is in her works such as Tales from Fashionable Life, which include the novels Belinda and Ennui, where one can find the clearest characterisations of the kind of child the naturalists perceived would be the result of Rousseauean education, although it must be noted that by the early years of the nineteenth century, Richard Lovell Edgeworth had broken somewhat with his total dedication to the notions of Rousseau. However, for the most part, the kind of education touted by the Lichfield Circle was Rousseauean in philosophy, if on a more practical and practicable level than that documented in the Emile. The female characters in Maria´s novels Castle Rackrent, The Absentee, and Belinda are the personifications of the Lichfield Circle´s view of what constitutes ideal womanhood.

Thomas Day´s version of appropriate education is featured in the transformation of Tommy Merton from a spoiled, selfish brat to a picture of moral, selfless behaviour in Sandford and Merton (1783). The female role models are provided by the mothers of Tommy Merton and Harry Sandford, symbolising opposing ends of the societal spectrum.

Certainly no account of the Lichfield Circle would be complete without some mention of Anna Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield". [6] Although the members of the Lichfield group were scientifically-minded and empirical in their approach to education and philosophy, Anna Seward, "The Singing Swan" [7] was certainly no scientist. A poet and writer, she is included in the group not so much for her work in education nor for her characterisations of what denotes ideal childhood, but rather for her role as a catalyst for the group.

Because she lived her entire life in Lichfield, she provided the central focus for the rest of the members of the group socially. Her letters and comments, as well as her thumb-nail sketches of her contemporaries are excellent sources if one remembers that it was her nature to be rather cutting in her assessments. Her Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin (1804) provides the twentieth century with an intriguing view of a century long past and the figures who made it live.

The thesis will comprise six chapters. Chapter II introduces the members of the Lichfield Circle within the context of the political and social issues of the eighteenth century. Included as one of the social issues of the period is a discussion of women and their emergence as a distinct social group during the eighteenth century.

Chapter III presents a picture of the Lichfield Circle´s view of ideal womanhood; it is from their conceptualisation of the ideal woman that their perception of an ideal female education is drawn.

Chapters IV and V present studies of female education in the domestic setting and boarding schools respectively, attempting to critique the eighteenth century state of affairs as viewed through the eyes of the members of the Lichfield Circle, and their recommendations for change.

Finally, in Chapter VI, a short summation will be provided, drawing some conclusions from the research in the rest of the work.

Footnotes

1. H.G. Good, A History of Western Education, 2nd. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 246.

2. W.A.C. Stewart, Progressives and Radicals in English Education, 1750 - 1970 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972), p. 100.

3. Mary Cathcart Borer, Willingly to School (London: Lutterworth Press, 1976), p.198.

4. Ibid., pp.186-187.

5. Dorothy Gardiner, English Girlhood at School (London: Humphrey Milford, 1929), pp.347ff.

6. It has proven impossible to discover the origin of this title in reference to Anna Seward, but there is little doubt that the term was, indeed, widely used in discussing her beauty and her poetry. See E.V. Lucas, A Swan and her Friends (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), p. 2.

7. Margaret Eliza Ashmun, The Singing Swan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931).

Chapter 2 THE LICHFIELD CIRCLE IN THE AGE OF REASON

The Lichfield Circle was one of the several intellectual coteries which sprang up in the provincial towns of eighteenth century England. Its members were dedicated to that most important concept of the eighteenth century - Reason. Their rationality and their desire for the improvement of society through technological and scientific discovery assured their works a place, if not in the hearts, then at least in the libraries of the middle and upper classes who shared the common eighteenth century zeal for improvement through the application of rational thought. In addition to writing scientific treatises, they addressed in written form many of the social and political issues of their day. They were well-known throughout both England and France, and their views were widely discussed. Their educational and literary works were popular and were reprinted in numerous editions.

Centred in the flourishing cathedral town of Lichfield, its members socialized, theorized, and interacted within their intellectual and social circle.

The literary products of their time spent in the Lichfield and surrounding areas of Birmingham and Derby became standard fare for the inquiring middle class mind of eighteenth century England. This chapter will serve to introduce the members of the Lichfield Circle, and will discuss their attitudes toward the society of which they formed a part. The political and social views of the group will be discussed to provide some insight into the attitudes they developed in a society experiencing the stress of the crumbling sanity of George III facing both revolution in the American colonies, and the tide of revolutionary fervour from across the English Channel.

In any discussion of the attachment of this group to the Lichfield area, it is necessary to introduce first Anna Seward, the Swan of Lichfield, for it was she alone of the group who lived all her life at Lichfield. Although not important to this study for any contribution to the field of female education, she was an integral member of the group in that she served as a stimulus to the other members. Her home and family were instrumental in bringing together Darwin and Edgeworth. She entertained Thomas Day, and despised Johnson, that most famous citizen of Lichfield. 1

Anna Seward was born in 1742, the daughter of the Canon of Lichfield. She lived all her life in the Cathedral Close, a rambling, comfortable mansion. The death of her sister at an early age bears witness to the stresses placed on eighteenth century girls to marry well. Her sister Sara succumbed to melancholia and eventual death as a result of a marriage contracted under parental pressure to a man much older than herself who was of little appeal to the girl. 2

That Anna Seward was considered beautiful in her day there can be little doubt. Although her biographer Margaret Ashmun describes her as "a tall, stout, handsome woman with the imperious bearing of Queen Elizabeth", 3 Sir Walter Scott's description of her in advanced years is far more indicative of the magnetic effect which she had on those who knew her. He wrote of her:

> Miss Seward, when young, must have been exquisitely beautiful; for, in advanced age, the regularity of her features, the fire and expression of her countenance, gave her the appearance of beauty, and almost of youth. Her eyes were auburn of the precise shade and hue of her hair, and possessed great expression. In reciting, ... they appeared to become darker; and, as it were, to flash fire. 4

She was a poet of some renown in her own day, although her poetry is ignored today. She wrote a monody on the death of Major André, who had been a suitor of the young Honora Sneyd. Honora had been raised with the Seward family and had been a great favourite of Anna's. After the charming but penniless André had been deemed an unsuitable match for Honora, he left England, and became involved in the American Revolution, where he was eventually hanged as a spy, having been connected with the passing of information through Benedict Arnold. Anna Seward was a woman of some influence. After the release of this poem which attacked Washington for his treatment of Major André, Washington personally wrote Miss Seward to present his side of the case. [5]

She was a dear friend of Erasmus Darwin, although Ashmun disagrees with E.V.Lucas' interpretation that her interest was of a romantic nature. [6] Ashmun maintains that Miss Seward's love was John Saville, the Vicar Choral of Lichfield, who, although married, returned her love.

Darwin and she wrote poetry together for many years, and it is believed that a long section in Darwin's Botanic Garden was borrowed unacknowledged from Miss Seward. [7] Obviously she was flattered by the gesture, for she and Darwin remained friends until his death, after which she was commissioned by Darwin's family to write an account of his life. Her Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin is a delightful look at her age through the eyes of "a woman who was utterly enthusiastic and sentimental... with a genius for inaccuracy but apparently no consciousness of malice". [8] In fact, the Darwin family was less than pleased with the work, as it had been rather too honest in certain details of Darwin's private life.

Anna Seward was advanced for her day in that she was one of the few who, as early as 1798, recognized that the romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge was poetry of lasting worth. [9] From 1807 to 1809 she corresponded regularly with Robert Southey, who would later become the poet laureate of England. On one occasion she entertained him in her home for a week. [10]

She was a close enough friend of Sir Walter Scott to impose upon him to publish her poetical works in a posthumous volume, a work which he undertook gallantly, but with some professional trepidation, having recognized that the poetry itself was of inferior quality. [11]

The friendships which formed the basis of the Lichfield Circle came into being with the arrival of Dr. Erasmus Darwin to the Lichfield area in 1756 at the age of twenty-four. He was the son of a private gentleman and was not handsome. He was "somewhat above the middle size, of form athletic, and inclined to corpulence, his limbs too heavy for exact proportion". [12] Richard Lovell Edgeworth´s description is more blunt, calling Darwin "a large man, fat, and rather clumsy". [13] As well, he stammered badly, but these natural deficiencies could not prevent him from becoming "a best selling poet, the finest doctor of his day, a prolific inventor, a witty talker, and a propounder of many scientific theories, including evolution." [14]

Nor is his biographer Desmond King-Hele exaggerating, for Darwin was indeed all of these things. His poetical work The Botanic Garden was widely acclaimed. His work Zoonomia was more scientific in nature, but was also in poetical form. In fact, his poetry was so widely accepted, that Margaret Ashmun claims that Wordsworth´s 1796 essay on poetic diction was "from beginning to end an anxious attack on the poetry of Erasmus Darwin, then much more popular than his own." [15]

An inventor of some note, he developed carriages with springs to further his own comfort in the hours of riding to administer to the sick in his extensive practice. These carriages were designed to allow Darwin to write or read while riding. He experimented with the inoculation of his own children against measles, but the trial was somewhat of a disaster. [16] He also wrote extensively on nature, and developed much of the theory of evolution; indeed, his grandson Charles was subjected to much scientific criticism for failing to acknowledge adequately the debt from his grandfather. [17] By sending electrical impulses through the limbs of paralytic frogs, Darwin realized before the day of either Volta or Galvani that nerve impulses were electrical. [18] He also recognized the danger of lead in cosmetics. [19]

In the field of health, Darwin was a pioneer in recognizing that physical and mental health are linked. He recognized the presence of several neuroses, and was one of the first medical men to recommend the treatment of mental illness with kindness and humanity, in an age when it was more likely to be treated with brutality.[20]

His scientific interest was reinforced by the monthly meetings of the Lunar Society, which had been founded in 1766 by Darwin, Matthew Boulton, and Dr. Small. The meetings were held in the Lichfield or Birmingham areas on the night of the full moon, which would allow the participants to return to their homes by moonlight after a dinner meeting and discussion on some scientific advancement. The Lunar Society formed a basis for Darwin's friendship with other members of the Lichfield Circle such as Priestley, Beddoes, and Edgeworth who also shared his interest in science.

Erasmus Darwin raised two families, his first consisting of five children. Later, after a period of bachelorhood during the 1770's after the death of his first wife, he remarried and raised a second family of seven children. Darwin's second son Robert married Susannah Wedgewood, the daughter of Josiah Wedgewood of the famous pottery concern, and it was their son Charles who was to give the Darwin name to the theory of natural selection.

It was the fame of Dr. Darwin's work in the improvement of coaches and carriages which attracted the "gay and debonair" [21] Richard Lovell Edgeworth to the Lichfield area. The two became fast friends, sharing a mutual interest in science and invention. In Edgeworth, Darwin saw "a conjuror... who has the principles of Nature in his palm, and moulds them as he pleases." [22] Richard Edgeworth´s life was one so ripe with interesting adventures that to relate them fully would require a far greater space than that available in a work of this kind. Suffice it to say that in the space of his life which spanned the years 1746 to 1817, he married four times, fathered twenty-two children, and was generally regarded as a kindly and loving father, bent on the improvement of the world and his children through the use of invention and education.

His scientific genius was advanced for his time. Edgeworth had worked in the 1770´s in Lyons, France, on a project attempting to divert the flow of the mighty Rhone river to allow expansion of the town. Although the project was not finished during the eighteenth century, a modern visitor will see that the method used in the achievement of the goal in the late nineteenth century was Edgeworth´s. As early as 1790, he devised a method of telegraph which could send messages up to fourteen miles. [23]

Although there is little evidence of animosity between any members of the Lichfield Circle, there appears to have been a serious rift between Edgeworth and the Swan of Lichfield. As has been stated, Honora Sneyd was the protégée of Miss Seward. In 1773, Richard Edgeworth and Honora were married. It would appear that Anna was jealous of losing her friend, and her envy caused Honora to sever all ties with her. Anna never forgave Edgeworth for having taken her friend from her, calling him "the specious, the false, the cruel, the murderous Edgeworth, who cankered first and then crushed to earth, the finest of human flowers."[24]

It is ridiculous to state that Edgeworth caused the consumption which killed Honora, and later her sister Elizabeth who became his third wife. The plague of consumption took its toll on all the Edgeworth family, for of the twenty-two children, ten of them died before the age of thirty-five.

The break between Seward and Edgeworth was made permanent by Edgeworth´s removal of his family to his estate in Edgeworthstown, Ireland. Here, his dedication to the improvement of mankind through the application of reason and science made his estate one of the most comfortable and progressive in Ireland. The relative comfort of the tenant farmers on Edgeworth's estate stood as an example of what could be achieved if the English landlord could be persuaded to take an interest in his Irish holdings.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth was the reason for Thomas Day's arrival in Lichfield. They had first met in 1766. In his Memoirs, Edgeworth notes that his first impression of Thomas Day was "not prepossessing".

> At a period when elegance of attire was at its height, and gentlemen took their promenade exactly as they would go to Court, Day appeared like a savage. He 'seldom combed his raven locks', and his clothes were unfit for a gentleman. To a generation which was fully alive to the riskiness of putting water on the body it was no compensation that Day 'was remarkably fond of washing in a stream'. 25

Miss Seward viewed Day as "less graceful, less amusing, less brilliant than Mr. Edgeworth, but more highly imaginative, more classical, and a deep reasoner." [26] Elsewhere, she was prompted to add that he was of "sedulous and diffusive charity, greatly overbalanced on the side of virtue, the tincture of misanthropic gloom and proud contempt of common life society." [27] Regardless of his lack of grace, there can be no doubt as to Day's intense sense of moral virtue. Miss Seward commented that he was indeed "a rigid moralist, who proudly imposed on himself cold abstinence, even from the most innocent pleasure."[28]

Day had met Rousseau in 1770. His great admiration for Rousseau's educational philosophy prompted him to attempt to raise a Sophie as a wife for himself. His adoption of two foundling girls for this purpose makes an amusing story when viewed from the twentieth century, but the fact that he never considered casting the girls off when the the experiment had failed is ample proof of his good intentions and charitable humanity. Neither did Thomas Day cast off his stepfather, who was reputed to be, in the words of Anna Seward, "a carping, disagreeable churl, who made the young man's life miserable by interference and tyranny."[29] This is not the opinion of George Gignilliat, a biographer of Day, who states that, in fact, Day and his stepfather got on tolerably well, considering the fact that his mother had married beneath herself both socially and intellectually.[30]

The prime work for which Thomas Day is remembered is his work on education, The History of Sandford and Merton, which experienced great success in the eighteenth century, and which was sufficiently popular in the nineteenth century to require two more editions.

It is a moral tale detailing how appropriate educational philosophy and practice can develop the character into one which appreciates nature and abounds in human charity. Unfortunately, his other works were "doomed from their very nature to an early death", being by nature "occasional, political, and radical." [31] Thomas Day died in 1789 at the age of forty-one, from the fall of a horse which he was attempting to break using a system of kindness rather than brutality. [32]

Both Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Thomas Day greatly affected the development of Edgeworth's daughter Maria, who was to become one of the most celebrated authoresses of the early nineteenth century. Born in 1767, the third child of Edgeworth's first marriage, she remained all her life within the confines of the family, having passed over her one chance at marriage to a Swedish courtier, a Mr. Edelcrantz. She was petite, and at a very early age showed an imaginative literary talent, by writing what she called "wee wee stories" for her younger siblings.

Whereas many fathers of the age would have frowned on this sort of activity, Richard Lovell Edgeworth completely encouraged her talent, setting forth plots for her to write, and submitting her efforts to his criticism. Indeed, Maria commented at one point that her stories were quite covered by "the crooked marks of Papa's critical indignation." [33]

Many critics are of the opinion that her works would have benefitted if they had been less subjected to Edgeworth's critical comments, for her father's changes stilted her naturally flowing writing style. The Absentee, a novel about the evils of the system of absentee landlords in Ireland, is reputed to be her best novel. It is of significance to add that it was written and published totally as a surprise for her father. [34]

Having written Practical Education with her father in 1797, Maria's literary career was launched with the appearance of Castle Rackrent in 1800. By 1813 she was lionized in the London season, along with Madame de Staël, whom she admired greatly but never met. Her longstanding friendship with Sir Walter Scott and his family is evidence that she was considered an author of some note.

The death of her father in 1817 paralyzed her writing ability as can be evidenced by the fact that there is a five year gap between his death and her next major publication. However, during this time she did finish his memoirs for publication in 1820. The first volume of Richard Edgeworth's memoirs had read rather like Rousseau's Confessions, and Maria had feared they had been rather too personal and too revealing. She worried, therefore, about finishing the project. In 1820, she escaped to Paris with two of her younger sisters, where she stated in a letter home, "I dreaded hearing it spoken of." [35]

Her close relationship with her father allowed her access to his friends, from whose society she greatly benefitted. She was particularly fond of Thomas Day, whom she visited regularly. George Gignilliat states that the epistolary style of Letters to Literary Ladies is based upon the arguments and discussions of Day and her father. In the Letters, the pro-education stance is that of Edgeworth, and the view opposing female education as it was most generally applied was that of Thomas Day. [36]

Another acquaintance of her father whom she knew and liked was one Joseph Priestley, who had come to the Lichfield area in his capacity as Unitarian minister for the town of Birmingham in the mid 1770's. Priestley, born in 1733, had been raised for the dissenting ministry, and had experienced two less than successful postings. He had begun increasingly to experiment with scientific phenomena in Leeds in 1767, during which time he had become friendly with Benjamin Franklin. After some experimentation, he had written The History of Electricity. [37]

Priestley was closely connected with the peerage in his assignment as librarian to Lord Shelburne in 1773. This association became less than cordial as Priestley's politics became more radical. However, the experience did allow him to travel to France, during which time he met Lavoisier, and apparently casually mentioned to him that he had prepared oxygen gas. There is scientific dispute as to who really was the discoverer of oxygen. It appears that Priestley did make the discovery, but it was Lavoisier who instantly recognized the significance of the gas which Priestley called "dephlogisticated air". [38] Lavoisier correctly interpreted Priestley's work, and wrote the theory of oxidation. [39] Priestley's failure to interpret correctly his own work has cost him some degree of scientific recognition.

However, Priestley is credited with the discovery of nitrous oxide in 1772 [40] and with the anaesthetising effect of carbon dioxide on wounds in 1769. [41] In 1770, he developed carbonated water, [42] and many years later, after having been hounded from his own country by mob violence and the conservative nature of England in 1794, he settled in America where he isolated carbon monoxide gas in 1799. [43] He died on his farm in Pennsylvania in January of 1804.

Priestley's interest in oxygen was shared by a young doctor, Thomas Beddoes, who had translated Lavoisier's treatise on oxygen in 1793 while a lecturer in Chemistry at Oxford. [44] Although he had met Darwin at Oxford in 1787, it was his work with the isolation of gases which brought him to the Birmingham area, where he also took part in the discussions of the Lunar Society. [45]

He was "fat and solemn" [46] and in the words of his partner Humphrey Davy, "one of the most original men I ever saw - nothing characteristic externally of genius or science; extremely silent, and in a few words, a bad companion." [47] These rather negative comments can be offset by Maria Edgeworth's appraisal of him as "good-humoured, good-natured, and a man of honour and virtue." [48] Perhaps the Edgeworth view should take precedence, for Beddoes married Anna, the last child of Edgeworth´s first marriage.[49]

Scientifically, Beddoes has been credited with the development of the oxygen tent and his belief that the lungs could well be an efficient route through which to administer medication to the sick.[50] It was Beddoes who recognized that nitrous oxide, when inhaled, caused light headedness, and although he did not recognize that it could be used for an anaesthetic, the field of anaesthetics grew directly out of Beddoes´ work in "pneumatic medicine".[51]

> It is not too much to say that in Beddoes´ experiments with carbon dioxide we see the first foreshadowing of the idea that it might be possible to obliterate pain by means of a gas. Indeed we now recognize that carbon dioxide is an anaesthetic agent and on these grounds it might be argued that Beddoes was the first man to suggest the employment of an efficient gas for the relief of pain. 52

Through Beddoes´ friendship with Priestley and Darwin, he was sent to Clifton in 1790 to meet Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who was wintering there in the hopes that the waters would cure Edgeworth´s daughter Honora. Although the winter did not cure Honora, the meeting did effect the relationship between Anna and Beddoes, and he did succeed in obtaining aid for establishing the Pneumatic Institute of Medicine.

An enthusiastic believer in pneumatic medicine [53] in the hopes of curing consumption, Beddoes often failed to document correctly results of his experiments. By the time the Institute was ready to open in 1799, the absence of any real successes in the treatment of consumption by his methods had led to the collapse of the credibility of pneumatic medicine. The institute struggled on under the supervision of Beddoes and his partner Humphrey Davy, who would one day become famous in his own right, and closed in 1802. [54]

After the failure of the Pneumatic Institute, Beddoes established a Preventive Institution for the poor where they could receive advice on proper nutrition and living habits. Here he lectured on many of the notions he had expressed in a former work Hygeia. For his work in this area, he has been called "the father of preventive medicine". [55]

Not only was Beddoes a scientist and doctor, but he was also a gifted writer. In 1792 he had written a poem of 562 lines entitled Alexander´s Expedition down the Hydaspes and Indus to the Indian Ocean. The work was similar to Darwin´s Economy of Vegetation, in that it contained several lengthy footnotes of significance relating to political issues of the day. In 1793 he published The History of Isaac Jenkins, a moral tale in which he dispensed advice on sanitation, nutrition, and healthful living. The work shows Beddoes to have been "humane and kindly, eager for improvement and reform." [56]

This then was the Lichfield Circle. Although they did not all live in Lichfield itself, they inhabited the surrounding area, and communicated their ideas over a period of several years. Their families were intertwined through friendship and marriage, and their ideas compatible, arising as they did from a belief in improvement through science. However, it is impossible and even undesirable for a group to remain totally insular and this was also the case with the Lichfield Circle. Not only is it important to note their activities and attitudes as an intellectual coterie at the regional level, but one must also recognize that they were a part of the wider society in which they lived, reacting to the various political and social issues of their day.

The historian J.H. Plumb, in writing of the eighteenth century, makes an interesting point which is of some significance in discussing the political views of the Lichfield Circle. He states that as the ideas of improvement and reason percolated down through the class structure, and were evidenced in the heightened interest in education of the lower orders, an intellectual rift occurred between the upper and middle classes midway through the century.[57] He notes that the upper classes by 1750 had come to distrust mass education, and that from then on, scientific discovery and innovation came to be carried by the middle class rather than the upper class Newtons and Lockes of the late seventeenth century.

As Plumb notes, it was in the eighteenth century that the affluence of the middle class gave them the leisure to read and to study. Change was a galloping force, especially in the dissemination of knowledge. For example, in 1690 England had only one major newspaper, "The London Gazette", which was mainly a forum for official documents.[58] Nor were there any book clubs or circulating libraries. Most published materials were of a religious or classical nature, and these were published only in large, expensive, quarto volumes, available only to the most wealthy.[59]

However, by 1750, every provincial town had its own newspaper. Although religious subjects were still popular as topics for published material, novels and poetical works were also plentiful. Circulating libraries could be found in abundance, and books were printed in parts, each part available for only pennies. Instruction manuals concerning care of pets and gardening were also available in great numbers, indicative not only of a desire for improvement, but also of an economic situation which, for an increasingly greater segment of the population, allowed the leisure time necessary to develop hobbies.[60]

The Lichfield Circle can certainly be cited as an example of Plumb's theory concerning middle class scientific expertise. Dedicated to what Thomas Paine called "the Age of Reason" the Lichfield Circle remained on the leading edge of the many scientific developments during the Industrial Revolution. It was the era in which man realized his own potential for improvement, and improvement came to be the watchword of the century.

It was actually a result of the improvements in agricultural techniques which indirectly gave rise to the Lichfield Circle. As the displaced agricultural labourers flocked to the provincial towns because of the enclosure movement, great new towns were formed.

Whereas in 1690, London had been the only English city of any size, by 1780 Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, and Leeds were all important industrial towns. These great provincial towns attracted "knots of enlightened men with a passionate regard for empirical knowledge, and secular in their intellectual attitudes."[61] Among these were the Lichfield Circle.

According to Plumb, the percolating effect of upper class attitudes spelled the end of the truly innovative notions of the first half of the century. As the upper class convervative attitudes crystallised by the mid 1750´s, this conservatism was carried downward in ever-increasing strength during the 1760´s and onward. This meant that by the early 1770´s, to be a reformer meant to be labelled radical, and therefore, beyond the pale of the mainstream of middle class society.

To a great extent, one´s conservative, moderate, or radical bent could be determined by where one stood on the great issues of the eighteenth century - slavery, the American and French Revolutions, government reform, education, religion, and the emerging role of women. The following discussion will attempt to advance the thesis that, although most of the members of the Lichfield Circle were respectable members of middle class society, they were, in fact, quite radical in their political views.

Slavery was rapidly becoming one of the most contentious issues of the eighteenth century, as great numbers of people found an allure in the humanism inspired by the writing of the French philosophes. Rising out of the great Romantic movement of the latter half of the eighteenth century, the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth focussed on the freedom of the human spirit. The Romantics' sentimentalising of the lack of liberty under the savage social conditions arising out of the Industrial Revolution, combined with the call for Liberty across the Channel, meant that slavery was soon to be regarded as a great social evil.

Thomas Day was undoubtedly the most outspoken member of the group with regard to the slavery issue. At a time when the slave trade was a lucrative form of income for English shipowners, Day had in 1773 published a lengthy poem The Dying Negro, to be followed by the publication of several anti-slavery pamphlets in 1784. His portrayal of the black in bondage was reminiscent of romantic poetry in its emotionally-charged language. There are also examples of his anti-slavery sentiment in Sandford and Merton, where a black man saves the boys engaged in the sport of bull-baiting. The story of his life as a slave is intended to educate and change attitudes toward slavery. [62]

In complete agreement with his views was Erasmus Darwin. Although he rarely published tracts of a political nature, he made several statements indicating his stance against slavery in The Botanic Garden.[63]

Beddoes imitated Darwin's style in his Alexander's Expedition. The footnotes of the lengthy poem were intended as a political statement against British colonialism, one aspect of which was a master-servant relationship amounting to slavery. The poem documented the unnecessarily harsh treatment of the Hindus in the Calcutta Famine of 1771. Beddoes wrote:

> The moral character of the Hindoos can never begin to improve, if it needs improvement, till the last hour of their merciless tyrants from Europe shall arrive.[64]

Closely linked with the essential arguments concerning the basic right to liberty of the human spirit was the struggle of the American colonies. The Lichfield Circle appears to have been strongly in favour of the self-determination of the colonies. Although Anna Seward felt no hesitation in attacking General Washington for his treatment of Major André, she was to the end of her life aligned with the American side in the struggle. Ashmun states that "she never ceased to cast reproaches on an insensate ministry who drove them to the fury of rebellion."[65]

In fact, pro-American sentiment was quite popular in England during the late 1760's. However, once war with England broke out, this feeling was in the minority position. By the time the American Congress appealed to the French for assistance, to be pro-American was regarded in an increasingly suspicious manner by the growing conservative elements of English society.

However, the unpopularity of an issue failed to deter Thomas Day. He published "Ode to America" in 1776, and quickly followed it by "The Devoted Legions", in which he attacked the British government for its involvement in the struggle. The same year saw his publication of Ode to the New Year, in which he sided with the Opposition against the king and government in their decision to vote more money and arms to crush the Rebellion. In 1777, he published The Desolation of America, which documented British atrocities in the war.[66] He attacked by pen the excise taxes on the colonies. He demanded a speedy end to a war which was the result of the "tyranny of a cranky philosopher."[67] In 1784, his Letters of Marius admonished the British government for the cost of an unjust war.[68]

The conservative reaction to the independence of America was a factor in English sentiments concerning the French Revolution. The ruling class, still smarting from the loss of the American colonies, looked nervously across the Channel at the growing discontent of the French middle and lower classes. Many segments of society who had looked favourably on the American colonies' struggle for independence before the American fiasco, had turned to the conservative side as a result of the higher taxes arising from the prolonged campaign. They also feared a similar uprising in England, for the government of George III was less than popular for its handling of the struggle.

The majority opinion among the middle and upper classes concerning the French Revolution was a conservative one, opposing the notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity being propounded in France. Therefore, the attitudes of the Lichfield Circle were certainly radical in their support for the struggle. Least radical of the group concerning the French Revolution was Anna Seward, who supported it only in the earliest and most theoretical phases.[68]

Joseph Priestley was probably the most radical of the group, certainly in the eyes of the governing class. In 1782, Priestley published History of the Corruptions of Christianity, which was intended to set out the truths of Unitarianism. Although in his own eyes it was his finest work, the book would cost him dearly later, for it made enemies of powerful people such as Burke and Gibbon.[70] While in Birmingham, he wrote thirty other pamphlets of a political nature, attacking everything from the established church to the politics of the king.

In 1791, he wrote an open letter attacking Edmund Burke´s pamphlet on the French Revolution. To Burke´s supporters, it was a treasonable act, and they incited a mob of the lower orders to violence, resulting in the destruction of Priestley´s house and laboratory.[71] The final straw came when, in 1793, the French National Assembly voted Priestley a French citizen. This could indeed be interpreted as treason, whereupon Priestley fled to America in 1794.[72]

Thomas Beddoes, too, suffered as a result of his stand supporting the Revolution, for in 1792 he resigned his lectureship at Oxford over the furor created by his pamphlet praising the Revolution.[73] Thomas Day and Richard Lovell Edgeworth were also in favour of the French Revolution, although they failed to take so public a stand on the issue.

However, Thomas Day was much more vocal in his demand for government reform in his own land. In 1779 he joined a Society for Promoting Constitutional Information.[74] His radical political stance was evident in his declaration that "subjects are entitled to change their rulers" and that "Kings must expect allegiance no longer than they deserve it."[75] This would certainly have been viewed as treasonable in the conservative reactionary climate of 1794. His Dialogue Between a Justice of the Peace and a Farmer in 1784 focussed on the inequities of the British political system. He demanded an end to taxes on tea, bricks, and tiles.[76] He condemned the widespread use of bribery in elections.[77]

Thomas Beddoes, labelled by his contemporaries as a "radical enthusiast"[78] was also a reformer in domestic politics. In 1795, the government of Pitt, facing increasing discontent concerning domestic matters, attempted to introduce the Gagging Bills which would prohibit the publication of political pamphlets and would control political meetings. In direct reaction to these proposed legislative moves, Thomas Beddoes participated in an anti-Gagging Bill meeting in 1795, and helped to formulate "A Bill of Rights against the Gagging Bills".[79]

The members of the Lichfield Circle managed to maintain their position in respectable middle class society, despite the fact that they were regarded as radical in their political views. Moreover, although they have been viewed from the twentieth century as somewhat conservative people, some of their actions tended to flout the mores of the middle class of the eighteenth century. For example, Richard Lovell Edgeworth managed to marry the sister of his deceased wife, which was in definite contravention of the laws of the Church of England. A possible explanation for this having been accomplished lies in the carelessness of the Church in publishing banns during that time.

Anna Seward also provides an example of actions which were questionable in that day. She fell in love with John Saville, who was married although separated. It is the opinion of Margaret Ashmun that their relationship was probably not a physical one;[80] however, while recuperating from a serious illness in 1801, Saville did live at Miss Seward's house. By directly flouting the accepted mores of the age, they provided fodder for the local gossips. Ashmun notes that when Saville died, Anna Seward "grieved like a widow."[81]

She also had become friends with the infamous Ladies of Langollen. These two women, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby had escaped the prospects of unhappy marriages arranged by their families, and fled to a Welsh vale, where they lived out their lives wearing men's clothes in total contentment with their lives. It is possible that the Ladies of Langollen were lesbians; they were certainly considered "beyond the pale" in their time. Their ostracism by society was ignored by Anna, who visited them often, and honoured them in a poem. [82]

Neither did Erasmus Darwin completely avoid the censure of local gossip. During the 1770′s his affair with a Mrs. Parker resulted in the birth of two illegitimate daughters, for whom his treatise on education was written. [83] When this affair of the heart cooled, he fell in love with a Mrs. Pole, who was married at the time.

> All over the Midlands this ugly, fat, lame, clumsy, stammering doctor was a leader and a force - shocking many by his openly expressed scepticism, offending others by his downright opinions, but able to do as he liked by reason of his extraordinary powers - even to the extent of unprofessional conduct; making love as a widower of fifty to a handsome and lively and married woman, and marrying her after the opportune demise of her husband. [84]

The members of the Lichfield Circle also received some public censure regarding their tendency to ignore religion. The latter decades of the eighteenth century experienced a groundswell of religious revival, which meant that piety and a devotion to scripture were the generally accepted mores of society. However, with the exception of Joseph Priestley, who was trained as a Unitarian minister, the Lichfield Circle regarded organized religion as having little importance. It was obvious that Edgeworth′s interest in the mysteries of science left little room for the metaphysics of Catholicism. It was his view that

> the absurdities of Popery are so glaring that to be hated they need only to be seen. But for the peace and prosperity of this country (Ireland) the misguided Catholic should not be rendered odious; he should rather be pointed out as an object of pity. 85

Although Thomas Day and Erasmus Darwin were known to cite scripture occasionally and paid lip service to organized Christianity, they were essentially oriented toward the sciences. Despite the fact that their values reflected Christian morality in practice, theirs was a morality of benevolence towards one´s fellow man rather than one based on one´s concern for an afterlife.

The members of the Lichfield Circle have been presented as political reformers who were progressive on issues such as slavery and government reform. Neither did they particularly fear the verbal censure of polite society with regard to their personal actions in affairs of the heart. However, the members of the group were not totally at odds with the society in which they lived. They shared the typical feeling that education was the key to the improvement of mankind.

The eighteenth century preoccupation with education can be explained by its dedication to the notion of Reason. Reason meant knowledge and knowledge meant improvement. However, the fact that the young were surviving infancy to a greater degree was certainly a factor in the increasing interest in education. In the early years of the eighteenth century, only one in four infants born in London survived.[86] By 1740 there had been an increase in population partly due to the improved methods of midwifery and the advent of the orphanage.[87]

Female education was an emerging issue in the eighteenth century for, particularly in the case of females, social position would be determined by "income, occupation and education."

> A woman's social class would be determined by her marriage, the prospects for which depended largely on her father's income and occupation. For her, these were fixed; there was nothing she could do to 'improve' them. But her education was another matter; it was in her power, or rather her parent's power, to buy an education which was, so to speak, above her station, to obtain for her what was conceived to be the education of a lady. 88

This possibility for social mobility would certainly explain the tremendous interest of the eighteenth century middle class concerning the education of females. This can be shown in the volume of literature on female education published during this time. The literature referring to female education serves as an excellent guide to the intellectual movements of the century. Each group - Evangelical, Utilitarian, Romantic, and Naturalist - expounded its own social theories through the education believed necessary to provide girls with a means to fulfilling their appropriate role within that society.

At any rate, it is certainly true that the members of the Lichfield Circle were dedicated to the education of female children. Their numerous works on education in general and female education in particular stand as ample evidence of their concern for these issues.

The concern for female education in the eighteenth century was a manifestation of a much wider issue. Women were emerging during this time as a distinct social group, and there appears to have been some confusion as to what their role should be. Although the woman of the eighteenth century stood a better chance of receiving some education than had her sisters in earlier generations, her position in society had not really altered since feudal days.[89] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's comment to her daughter in 1752 that "to say truth, there is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England"[90] was certainly a justified one.

Legally, a woman was regarded as the goods and chattel, first of her father and then, after marriage, her husband. Laws regarding women were closely bound up with property. Although a single woman could own property, once she became engaged to be married, she could no longer sell any of it, since it immediately became part of her fiancé's marital right. Divorce was virtually impossible for a woman. Adultery or physical cruelty on the part of the husband were regarded as insufficient cause. However, should the wife commit adultery, she could be, and usually was, abandoned without financial assistance. Should an ecclesiastical divorce be granted on the grounds of cruelty on the part of the husband, it was not regarded as a legal divorce. Such a divorce could be obtained only through a special act of Parliament, and then only at the request of a husband. It is little wonder that young women were cautioned against making an unwise marriage choice, for in the eighteenth century, it was indeed a case of "until death do you part".

The legal position of the eighteenth century woman, arising as it did out of feudal master-vassal relationships, carried serious economic ramifications for a woman. Although her husband was required to supply her with food and clothing, and was responsible for any debts she might incur, he had the legal right to any monies she might earn, even in the case of separation.

He also had the right to deny her access to her children, not only in the case of marriage breakdown, but also in the case of his own death. He could stipulate in his will who was to have control over her children, as incredible as this seems.

Given the above discussion, it is of little surprise to note that women were not enfranchised in eighteenth century England although they could "vote in vestry, and for the guardians of the poor".[91] Women could also "vote for and occupy the office of sexton, church-warden, and overseer of the poor" as these offices were considered "servile ministerial offices which require neither skill nor understanding.[92]

By mid century, it was clear that, although a woman's legal position had not changed, there were great changes taking place in her life economically and socially. During the last half of the eighteenth century, society for the first time focussed clearly on the role of women as a distinct social group, with special needs to be met and special talents to offer. This can be shown by the great volumes of literature identifying the appropriate role of woman, usually as wives and mothers. As the role of wife and mother gained increased respect within society, the special influence of women aroused some degree of antipathy and fear on the part many segments of society, resulting in a vast array of opinions concerning women and their appropriate role.

Much of the literature was written by people like the members of the Lichfield Circle. It was possible that women who were married to affluent middle class men were in danger of casting aside their traditional role due to the pernicious effects of indolence and ennui brought about by the hours of leisure forced on them. The Lichfield Circle agreed with both the Evangelicals such as Hannah More and the Utilitarians under Jeremy Bentham that leisure could be morally disastrous to a middle and upper class woman. Therefore, education would have to be provided which would help mould women into acceptance of the appropriate role. It is the attitude of the Lichfield Circle with regard to the role of women and the education most appropriate for them which will form the main body of this study.

The Lichfield Circle, then, was a progressive and even radical group politically. They were reformers with a penchant for technological improvement. They were scientists and doctors. They were also poets and authors, contributing to the literature of the age. They were in the forefront of the great issues of the eighteenth century; their opinions on several of these issues would find favour even in the present day.

Whether or not this liberal and progressive attitude carried over to their perception of ideal womanhood is a question which must be answered in the following chapter.

Footnotes

1. Margaret Eliza Ashmun, The Singing Swan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p. xi.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Ibid., p. xi.

4. Ibid., pp. 253 - 254.

5. Ibid., p. 86.

6. Ibid., p. 173.

7. Ibid., p. 68.

8. Ibid., p. xi.

9. Ibid., p. 260.

10. Ibid., p. 262.

11. Ibid., p. 253.

12. Anna Seward, Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin (London: T. Bensley, Bolt Court, printed for J. Johnson, 1804), p. 1.

13. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Memoirs, 2 vols. (London: R. Hunter, 1820), 1:102.

14. Desmond King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1963), p. v.

15. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. ix.

16. Seward, Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, p. 91.

17. King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin, p. 80ff.

18. Ibid., p. 9.

19. Ibid., p. 55.

20. Ibid.

21. Lucas, A Swan and her Friends (London: Methuen & Co.,1907), p. 43.

22. Hesketh Pearson, Doctor Darwin, p. 45, cited in King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin, p. 18.

23. Isabel Clarke, Maria Edgeworth (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1949), p. 41.

24. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. 63.

25. Samuel H. Scott, The Exemplary Mr. Day, 1748 - 1789, (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1935), p. 31.

26. Seward, Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, p. 19.

27. E.V. Lucas, A Swan and her Friends, p. 19.

28. Seward, Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, p. 33.

29. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. 41.

30. George Warren Gignilliat, The Author of Sandford and Merton. A Life of Thomas Day, Esq. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 12.

31. Ibid., p. 345.

32. Edgeworth, Memoirs, 2:103.

33. Clarke, Maria Edgeworth, p. 41.

34. Ibid., p. 43.

35. Ibid., p. 115.

36. Gignilliat, The Author of Sandford and Merton, p. 334.

37. Wallace Ruddell Aykroyd, Three Philosophers (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 52.

38. Ibid., pp. 66 - 67.

39. Frederick Fox Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia (Bristol: John Wright & Sons Ltd., 1952), p. 25.

40. Ibid., p. 6.

41. Ibid., p. 19.

42. Ibid., p. 33.

43. Aykroyd, Three Philosophers, p. 214.

44. Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia, p. 22.

45. Ibid., p. 40.

46. Gignilliat, The Author of Sandford and Merton, p. 330.

47. Edgar E. Macdonald, in Appendix A of Education of the Heart, The Correspondence of Rachel Mordecai Lazarus and Maria Edgeworth, E. Macdonald, ed.(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 320.

48. Clarke, Maria Edgeworth, p. 40.

49. The son of Anna and Thomas Beddoes, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, became a poet of some renown in the nineteenth century. While yet a student at Oxford, he wrote The Bride's Tragedy, (1822) which was well received. However, he suffered from personal problems arising out of a feeling of inadequacy when compared with his , brilliant father. Soon after his Oxford days, he studied medicine in Germany and actually practiced for some years in Switzerland. In 1849, at the age of 46, he committed suicide "in a fit of depression over the break-up of a close friendship with a German baker." It may be of some significance to note that, once he attained adulthood, he is never mentioned in Maria's correspondence. See Macdonald, App. A., The Education of the Heart, p. 324.

50. Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia, p. 86.

51. Ibid., p. 14.

52. Ibid., p. 86.

53. Pneumatic medicine arose from the belief that inhalation of certain gases in various combinations could effect a cure of disease. Beddoes concentrated most fervently on the application of this type of medicine to the disease of consumption.

54. Ibid., p. 125.

55. Ibid., p. 4.

56. Ibid., p. 64.

57. John Harold Plumb, In the Light of History (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1972), p. 6.

58. John Harold Plumb, The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth Century England, p. 5.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p. 10.

61. Plumb, In the Light of History, pp. 23 - 24.

62. Thomas Day, The History of Sandford and Merton, 3 vols. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), reproduced in facsimile from original (London: J. Stockdale, 1788), 2:299.

63. Erasmus Darwin, The Botanic Garden, II, ll. 413 - 430, III, ll. 435 - 468. Cited in King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin, p. 39.

64. Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia, p. 60.

65. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. 65.

66. Scott, The Exemplary Mr. Day, p. 108.

67. Ibid., p. 136.

68. Gignilliat, The Author of Sandford and Merton, p. 130.

69. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. 200.

70. Aykroyd, Three Philosophers, 130.

71. Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia, p. 29.

72. Ibid., p. 30.

73. King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin, p. 41.

74. Scott, The Exemplary Mr. Day, p. 134.

75. Ibid.

76. Gignilliat, The Author of Sandford and Merton, p. 228.

77. Ibid., p. 229.

78. Cartwright, The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia, p. 77.

79. Ibid.

80. Ashmun, The Singing Swan, p. 238.

81. Ibid., p. 239.

82. Lucas, A Swan and her Friends, p. 277.

83. King-Hele, Erasmus Darwin, p. 21.

84. Scott, The Exemplary Mr. Day, p. 45.

85. Clarke, Maria Edgeworth, p. 106.

86. John Harold Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 13.

87. Ibid., p. 78.

88. Peter J. Miller, "The Education of the English Lady" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1969) p. 45.

89. Ibid., p. 18.

90. Cited in Doris Mary Stenton, English Woman in History (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 264.

91. Miller, "The Education of the English Lady", p. 23.

92. Erna Reiss, Rights and Duties of Englishwomen, A Study in Law and Public Opinion (Manchester: Sherratt and Hughes, 1934), p. 41, cited in Miller, "The Education of an English Lady", p. 24.

Chapter 3 THE IDEAL WOMAN

The picture of the Lichfield Circle presented in the preceding chapter is one of progressivism concerning political issues. The members of this small group were among the avant-garde of their society, and they served to a great degree as a cutting edge for the rest of eighteenth century thought. Their ideas were bold and advanced for their time. Their views on the French and American Revolutions, on slavery, and on education were in many aspects more twentieth century than eighteenth century.

One might expect, therefore, that their views concerning females and their role within eighteenth century society would reflect this progressive thought. But did, in fact, the attitudes of the Lichfield Circle toward women reflect this same radical outlook? This is an interesting question, one which can be answered by an investigation into the literary works of the Lichfield Circle, with a view to presenting both their attitudes towards women and their conceptualisation of the ideal woman.

Summarily, when one reads their works with this in mind, it can be seen that the members of the Lichfield

Circle did not approach womanhood and its role in society in any kind of a reforming way. Their views are those of the eighteenth century in general, with some variations regarding the kind of education which would produce the ideal woman. Their application of these notions to a practical lifestyle and the social responsibilities of women will be documented at a later point in this chapter.

Basically, the Lichfield Circle were adherents of Rousseau, for whom Nature was the basis for all which was appropriate in the world. Naturally, then, if one looked to Nature as a basis for male-female relationships, given the apparent dominance of the male of the species in nature, it would be simple to explain the dominance of men politically, socially, and economically in eighteenth century society. True, the approach of the Lichfield Circle was one of scientific empiricism regarding the laws of Nature. The crucial question, however, lay not so much in the facts as in their interpretation and application regarding the place of women in society. In the eighteenth century, depending upon one´s point of view:

> Nature could be shown to be either cruel or kind, indifferent or concerned, coldly lifeless or warmly sensitive; her workings either understandable or inscrutable, lawful or chaotic, meaningful or meaningless; her intentions for man´s social and political

> arrangements either revolutionary or reactionary, liberating or repressive, individualistic or collectivistic. 1

In the Emile, Rousseau had looked to Nature to explain the position of women in society. He had discussed the relationship of the sexes in nature as requiring a dominance on the part of the male, and a corresponding passivity on the part of the female. He noted that the social relationship which existed between the male and female of the human species was a natural extension of their sexual natures. [2]

Rousseau went on to comment on the nature of and motive for female education:

> For this reason the education of women should always be relative to men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise us, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable - these are the duties of women at all times and what they should be taught in their infancy. 3

The English Naturalists, followers of Rousseau in their desire to reduce educational questions to an empirical science, although less definitive and rigid than Rousseau in their attitudes toward the place of women in society, held views reminiscent of Rousseau´s.

Thomas Day was the most Rousseauean of the group in his quest to raise a Sophie who would care for him, an experiment which was doomed to fail. The other members of the group appear to have held that socially the sexes should play a role clearly separate from one another, without assigning a superiority or inferiority to either one directly. But it is not difficult to see that the male role was one of fewer constraints.

Although the Lichfield Circle looked to Nature in their views concerning women, they were much more practical than Rousseau in their approach. Their view of woman´s role in society was a practical and Anglicized version of Rousseaueanism. In contrast to the character of Sophie, whom Rousseau presented as being very coquettish and flirtatious, yet extremely cunning in her dealings with Emile, the English version of the Rousseauean female was a more solid character, a domestic, matronly type. Whereas Sophie had an aversion to getting her hands dirty in the preparation of food, the Lichfield Circle´s ideal wife and mother could be very active in these areas.

The members of the group recognized that the way to happiness for both men and women lay in the knowledge of their respective roles and in the mutual respect each held for the importance of the other´s. Maria Edgeworth stated her approval of this companionate relationship through her novels. Lord Percival, for example, stated this concept when he announced in Belinda that "fortunately for society, the same conduct in ladies which best secures their happiness most increases ours".[4] Any departure from the assigned role was viewed as inappropriate and "unnatural".

Physically, then, what were the characteristics of the female, as viewed through the eyes of the Lichfield group of naturalists? It is easily seen that in Nature, the female of the species is generally the weaker. There is certainly in the work of the Lichfield Circle a recognition that the middle to upper class woman of the eighteenth century was physically much weaker than man. Although some inferiority in physical strength was seen as being naturally appropriate, the Lichfield group conceptualised the ideal woman as modelled after the Greek and Roman fashion, more robust as a consequence of her rearing and more appropriate education. In Hygeia, Essays Moral and Medical, Thomas Beddoes commented on Grecian beauty:

> Were not the Grecian beauties of a structure, somewhat more firm? The remains of antient (sic) art seem to say this with regard to the Greeks, and to the Romans also; - at least, before the degenerate period when the Romans had dwindled into helplessness under the continued influence of luxury. 5

Thomas Day cited his version of the ideal woman as "simple as a mountain girl in her dress, her diet, and her manner; fearless and intrepid as the Spartan wives and Roman heroines."[6] Anna Seward described her protégée, Honora Edgeworth, who was later to become the second wife of Richard Lovell Edgeworth as having "native strength... without having received a Spartan education."[7] The Classical model was obviously near to the hearts of these writers as a standard by which measure the real woman.

In discussing the physical characteristics of the female as viewed through the eyes of the Lichfield Circle, it is very difficult to avoid some comment on the moral implications arising from their physical nature, for, as Rousseau observed in the Emile, "the physical leads us unawares to the moral."[8] The Lichfield Circle measured women's worth to a greater degree by the yardstick of their moral goodness than by any scientific analysis of their physical nature in spite of their expressed intention to do so.

Despite the supposedly scientific approach to their discussion of female nature and education, the work of the Lichfield Circle reflects a continuing ambivalence regarding women and their place in society. An example of this ambivalence can be found in their discussions of the physical characteristics of women, which generally lapse into moralistic comments on the dangers of inactivity and an inappropriate lifestyle. Thus, in their discussions of female physical health, they realized that it was the enforced leisure imposed upon women by the customs of society which often led to the moral failing of indolence, which in turn could lead to physical ill health. The physical led to the moral, and moral implications led back to the physical and emotional in terms of health.

For example, although the members of the Lichfield Circle agreed with the society of their day in their evaluation of women as lacking the robust appearance of the Classical Greek, they did not view this as a totally natural situation, but rather a contrived one as a result of the unnatural and confining education most young girls received at the time. Thomas Beddoes commented in Hygeia that the accepted pattern of constraint, enforced leisure, and lack of exercise in rearing girls led to indolence, ennui, and ultimately to the fact that "among the different orders of society, women above the necessity of labour suffer the most." [9]

He also linked indolence with the advance of consumption, the scourge of the eighteenth century. After enumerating the physical characteristics which he thought indicated a presence of consumption, (among which were a narrow chest, inadequate movement of the rib cage, a long neck, and "sleek, fair skin, with turgid blue veins", 10) he cited the case of the lady of leisure:

> Our ladies, unable to receive and digest a proper quantity of aliment, are apt to fall farther short of immortality than their equals in society. They are scarce alive, while they continue to breathe: and in numberless instances, a fiend, infinitely more cruel than the nightmare, makes a lodgment in the bosom: and finishes by strangling them, after he has oppressed them long. 11

Indolence and ennui, the great debilitators of women, were the gravest fears of most writers of the eighteenth century, including the Lichfield Circle. Yet, although the members of the group recognized that the middle class woman was physically delicate due to the expectations of society in forcing a great deal of leisure and inactivity upon her, they, like others of the period, feared a more active role played by women and an increase in her strength.

Influenced by Rousseau's comments on the appropriateness of passivity on the part of the woman, the eighteenth century male and the Lichfield Circle too perceived that an increased level of female physical activity might be expressed in a more aggressive sexual role on the part of the woman. This heightened female sexuality would be ruinous to a society which depended upon women to be the guardians of its morality by shunning promiscuous behaviour, thereby upholding the sanctity of marriage.

Although the ever-present danger of ennui and indolence was a common theme in eighteenth moralist literature, Erasmus Darwin also demonstrated this ambivalent feeling towards the question of physical activity for females in his educational works. It is evident in his writing that he advocated a healthy upbringing for children, emphasising plenty of fresh air and exercise. He admired skating and swimming as excellent sources of the needed physical exercise for children, girls included. Yet he recognized that these sports were "not allow'd to ladies by the fashion of this age and country".[12]

It is disappointing that he failed to criticise this constraint on female conduct in the society of his time, but it is clear from his failure to do so, and from his unquestioning acceptance of the mores of the age, that he was no revolutionary concerning the place of women in that society. He was content to follow the status quo. This contradiction between his expressed need for more exercise and his acceptance of the realities of his day were again reiterated in his assertion that the acquisition of good embroidery skills were necessary because "ladies in polite life frequently have much leisure time at their disposal."[13]

The following words attributed to the first Mrs. Darwin during her last days provide a pathetic example of the physical inactivity of women in eighteenth century polite society. While it must be remembered that Mrs. Darwin was ill for several years, which could certainly account for many of the constraints upon her to remain at home while Darwin enjoyed the challenge of a successful medical career and the exciting scientific exchange of the members of the Lunar Society, she elsewhere states that the discomfort of her condition was of an intermittent nature, and that she enjoyed good health much of the time. Yet, she was prompted to comment, without a word of complaint:

> If from my husband's great and extensive practice, I had much less of his society than I wished, yet the conversation of his friends... was ever ready to enliven the hours of his absence... Those frequent absences gave a zest, even to delight when I could be indulged with his company. Married to any other man, I do not suppose I could have lived a third part of those years that I have passed with Dr. Darwin; he has prolonged my days, and he has blessed them.[14]

Her love for her husband is obvious, but it is also clear that her expectations excluded the possibility of an existence beyond her own home, or a life beyond the nurture of her children and the visits of good friends. Compared to Darwin, hers was a passive role. This same contradiction between the expressed view that children should be raised in an atmosphere of physical activity to promote the development of sound bodies as Nature intended, and the accepted view of women in society as playing retiring roles of nurture and passivity, filling their days with the pursuit of female accomplishments, is found in all the literary works of the Lichfield group.

This cycle of action-to-reaction whereby the physically delicate nature of females is perceived to lead to a moral destination is completed in Beddoes' Hygeia, where he relates the moral question back to the state of mental and physical health.

In this work, he linked morality and health in his discussions of the physical well-being for both sexes. However, while he admonished men that a life of debauchery could lead to venereal disease - a physical result, females were warned of nervous disorders as a result of their indolence resulting from a surfeit of leisure. His documentation of hysteria, epilepsy, and convulsion are all female case studies.

His essay on lunacy states that females were particularly subject to lunacy during pregnancy and childbirth in that "mental alienation... like epilepsy and other nervous disorders, are very frequent consequences of the exercise of the functions peculiar to the female constitution."[15] It is obvious that Beddoes´ attempt to deal with the female physical condition tends to be overwhelmed by his prejudices concerning the emotional and moral state of the female condition. However, in some defense of Beddoes, it must be stated that the tendency to view female health from a gynecological basis was common in that day. (Traces of this attitude linger to the present time.)

If the Lichfield Circle viewed the female physical state as a more delicate one (according to the dictates of Nature) a logical extension of this view would be to assume that a lower tolerance to physical pain on the part of women would be acceptable. However, this was not the case.

Although the ideal woman was physically less robust than man, she was not to tolerate pain in a less than manly fashion. The prevalence of physical discomfort which in the modern context can be controlled through the use of analgesics, was a common feature of daily life in the eighteenth century. Pain was intended to be coped with, and not yielded to without a struggle. There are several references in the Edgeworth´s Practical Education to conquering pain, or at least to its tolerance in a brave and accepting manner. Examples are given in Edgeworth´s Memoirs, where he praised his wives Honora and Elizabeth for their admirable attitudes in the face of lingering illness and their ensuing painful deaths from consumption in 1780 and 1797. The gradual tolerance of physical discomfort was to be a feature of appropriate female education and will be discussed in a later chapter.

No discussion of the physical aspects of ideal womanhood could be complete without some elaboration of the concept of beauty held by the members of the group. The fashions of the eighteenth century consisted of elegant and very elaborate gowns crowned by coiffures of rigid, powdered curls. The ritual of toilette for the fashionable lady could take hours to perform.

The Naturalists´ concept of female beauty required none of this elaborate preparation. In Thomas Day´s Sandford and Merton, Miss Simmons provides an example of ideal beauty. Day maintained that because her education was the antithesis of what was commonly acceptable in polite society, Miss Simmons had conserved a natural beauty which was "simple and unaffected".[16]

Erasmus Darwin allowed the use of ornamentation such as jewels or cosmetics in the case where "there exists but a mediocrity of beauty, and youth is on the wain"[17] but felt that generally

> "these ornaments are useless or injurious to youthful beauty; they add no power to the charm, but rather disenchant the beholder by abstracting his attention; which dwells with undiminsh´d rapture on beauty array´d by simplicity, and animated without affectation". 18

In direct contrast to the neo-Classical man of the eighteenth century for whom beauty followed a pre-determined model regarding appropriate proportion and physical features, the concept of beauty for the Lichfield Circle was one of allowing the internal good to show itself on the outside. Beauty then comes from within through character, and thus shows itself as Nature intends.

Conversely, discontentment of spirit is reflected in a loss of beauty. When Maria Edgeworth commented in The Wife: A Model for Women that "ill temper is the enemy of beauty"[19], she was warning girls to be satisfied with a simple life, to be content with their role in that life, and that contentment would be rewarded by a perceived beauty radiating from an inner peace.

The eighteenth century saw a general upsurge in female education, resulting in the increase of female literacy, and leading ultimately, by the 1770's, to the perfection of "salon" conversation as an art. The increasing interaction between males and females socially, although this interaction followed a rather rigid structure of propriety, did allow for an ever-increasing tendency for society to focus upon the intellectual attributes of females.

Eighteenth century opinion concerning female intelligence was roughly divided into three camps. On the conservative right were those such as Mrs. Trimmer and Hannah More who maintained that the female was unable to reason with the depth and agility of the male, and was therefore suited to no other role than that of wife, mother, or domestic. On the radical left were those such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay Graham who maintained that there was no inherent difference between male and female intellect, and demanded equal professional opportunity for women. The Lichfield Circle appear to have held the middle ground. They viewed female capacity for learning as equal to that of males, but could not see a need by society for this learning, other than the enrichment and enjoyment of the female herself. They certainly did not conceive of a need to educate girls with a view to creating career women.

Maria Edgeworth, in Letters to Literary Ladies, presented the two opposing arguments concerning female intelligence and the need for female education. In the second letter, in which she cleverly refuted the arguments stated in the first letter, she noted that the physical weakness of girls as compared to boys was not the issue in discussing innate female intelligence, for "intellectual ability has ever conquered mere bodily strength, from the times of Ajax and Ulysses to the modern day." [20]

She also noted a fact of physical development which was documented later by others studying the physical maturation process - the fact that "girls usually write much better than boys: they think and express their thoughts clearly at an age when young men can scarcely write an easy letter upon any common occasion." [21]

Recognition of the female´s intelligence was documented in several of Maria Edgeworth´s novels. The heroines who were destined to succeed in a happy and appropriate lifestyle were those whose "sound sense, enlivened by a playful wit, were rendered brilliant by the polish of elegant refinement." [22] In this example from The Wife: A Model for Women, Louisa was the ideal companion for her husband because her native intelligence had been properly developed by an appropriate education.

The character of Lady Ann Percival in Belinda serves as another example of Maria Edgeworth's conceptualisation of the manner in which Nature intended female intelligence to be used appropriately. Edgeworth wrote that Lady Anne had "without any pedantry or ostentation, a taste for literature which made her the chosen companion of her husband's understanding as well as his heart." [23] Maria could not resist the temptation to sermonise that, if wit and intelligence were used appropriately, they would ensure a happy domestic setting. If this were successfully achieved, the benefits to the wife were an increased respect for her by her mate, resulting in his desire to remain more often in her presence, and a domestic atmosphere which allowed children to develop as they ought in a happy home. [24]

Anna Seward also portrayed intelligence as a central feature of the ideal female, but it must be noted that, as with the other members of the Lichfield Circle, intelligence itself was insufficient if it were not also tempered by sound sense and practical virtues. She wrote a praising evaluation of the suitability of the first Mrs. Darwin, formerly Miss Mary Howard, for marriage to the eminent Dr. Darwin.

> A mind which had native strength, an awakened taste for the works of imagination; ingenuous sweetness; delicacy animated by sprightliness and sustained by fortitude, made her a capable, as well as fascinating companion, even to a man of talents so illustrious. 25

It can be noted that the concept of "wit" as referred to by members of the Lichfield Circle was in direct contrast to that of Rousseau. When Rousseau referred to female wit in the Emile, he was referring to a kind of cunning endowed upon women by Nature to compensate for their physical inferiority. Their strength, according to Rousseau must emanate from their ability to dominate through their sex and their "wit". 26 However, for the Lichfield Circle "wit" lacked any manipulative cunning and can be defined as a more positive attribute of the woman, that aspect of her conversation and manner which makes her a pleasing companion in male company.

It is clear that Seward felt that intelligence and wit were a pre-requisite for success on the part of a wife, in order to provide companionship for the man. This is doubly clear in her implied criticism of the superficiality of the second Mrs. Darwin, the widow of Colonel Pole. Although Seward referred to her as "not lacking in native wit" 27, she lamented the fact that

Darwin's talents were being wasted in his second marriage.

> The poetic philosopher in return transfers the amusements of his leisure hours from the study of botany and mechanics, and the composition of odes and heroic verses, to fabricating riddles and charades. 28

Given Miss Seward's tendency to comment rather severely on her friends' actions, it is possible that her attitude was precipitated by the insistence of Mrs. Darwin in removing her new family from Lichfield, preferring the Derby area. The Darwins moved there in 1782, and contact between Miss Seward and Dr. Darwin, for whom she held great admiration and possible romantic aspirations, were cut short.

Although it was fashionable by the late eighteenth century to accept that women had some intellectual capabilities, the intellectual qualities of the female were held to be of a different nature than those of the male. Whereas male intellectual capacities allowed deep, analytical reasoning, the female was perceived to be more emotional. Although she was able to reason and learn, the greatest mystique the female which so set her apart from the male intellectually was in her special affinity for the affective.

This affinity for emotionalism could easily be denigrated into weakness and character failing. The writers of the Lichfield Circle appear to reflect this opinion of women in this regard. For example, in Hygeia, Thomas Beddoes cited the case of one of his young female patients suffering from the typical nervous complaint:

> I... sometimes fall into a state, in which my senses forsake me; and I lie, as I am told, in a swoon, either with a pulse hardly perceptible and scarcely seeming to breathe, or I am drawn awry by spasms, or agitated by convulsions... My pulse pounds and my heart palpitates so that its throbs may be seen through my cloaths. 29

The symptoms appear to be quite serious. What is surprising from the twentieth century perspective is the young lady's description of the cause of this convulsion.

> These sort of attacks I have observed to be brought on by any considerable unpleasant emotion of mind, by sudden noises, particularly when I have risen unrefreshed and tremulous, by the scent of certain flowers and perfumes. 30

This over-reactive response to a simple stimulus was viewed as a typically female response because of her heightened affinity for the realm of the affective and instinctive.

Dr. Darwin also reflected a similar view of female emotionalism in his comments in A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools when he discussed the female propensity to dissolve into tears over trifles. He remarked that occasional tears were to be considered "an amiable weakness, and a mark of delicacy of the sex" [31] provided that they were tears shed in compassion for the misfortune of others. However, trivial crying showed "a kind of infantine debility of mind, and conveyed an idea of their being unfit for the common duties of life." [32]

He also discussed timidity as a typical female characteristic in need of correction. He called female timidity "the companion of debility of mind rather than of delicacy" [33] and praised education which could help young ladies rise above this natural weakness. Certainly Thomas Day, given his efforts to help his Sabrina overcome her natural propensity for fear, would have agreed.

There are countless examples of this inherent weakness of female character in the works of the Lichfield Circle, but it may be more constructive to approach the issue from the positive rather than the negative aspect. In many ways the female affinity for the emotional was a virtue in the eyes of eighteenth century society.

Influenced by Rousseau's perceptions of the nature of the female, the English Naturalists, while they often focussed on female weaknesses and character failings, could also perceive that those very weaknesses could serve as domestic virtues. For example, the very woman whose tender-hearted nature would make her a very inefficient soldier, could indeed make an ideal mother for children. In this way, what would be perceived as a handicap in the male world of business and politics was in reality a virtue in the female world, which was one in which the virtues of gentleness and intuitive perception fitted her for her role as wife and mother.

In the literary works appearing by the end of the eighteenth century, one is able to find a relationship between the affective suitability of women with an overall conceptualisation of the ideal woman as the ideal wife. The portrayal was one in which there were several prescribed duties for women to undertake if they were to conform to the ideal.

For example, the ideal mother cared personally for her children. Although the custom of wet-nursing was still practised to some extent, by the mid-eighteenth century most progressive educators and writers concerning infant health were following the Rousseauean concept of mothers nursing their own children. In The

Wife: A Model for Women Maria Edgeworth referred to infant nursing as "that most appropriate duty of a mother".[34] Thomas Beddoes blamed lack of physical activity for an inability to carry out the function of nursing, "the first office of the mother".[35]

A very important aspect of the female role within marriage was her responsibility in the education of the children. This duty, a common one in eighteenth century society, was often performed at home, either with the help of a governess or tutor, or under the direct supervision of the mother herself. In fact, it was due to the active role of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's second wife Honora, that Practical Education reached fruition several years later. During his marriage to Honora from 1773 until her death in 1780, she made detailed notes on the progress of her children. These notes became the basis for the essays on education produced by Maria and Richard Edgeworth in the early nineteenth century. Edgeworth attributed the success of the work to Honora's ability to document the progress and development of her children, and her active participation in the affairs which concerned them.

Anna Seward paid a high form of compliment to the first Mrs. Darwin in respect to the education of the Darwin children by saying that Dr. Darwin "to her could with confidence, commit the important task of rendering his children's minds to a soil fit to receive and bring to fruit, the stamina of wisdom and science."[36] This is indeed reminiscent of the garden metaphor found in Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, in which Julie, the ideal Rousseauean mother, commits herself to the pre-education of her children, rendering them fit for their father's tutorship at a later point in their lives.[37]

The importance of this role was continually addressed in the novels of Maria Edgeworth. The Percival family in Belinda depicted her image of appropriate child-rearing, a process undertaken by a mother who recognized "the sacred office imposed upon her by Nature."[38] One might contrast the ideal mother with the flighty Sophia in The Wife. She exemplified the fashionable lady of the time who abrogated her responsibilities to the care of others and pursued "that phantom pleasure under any other form than that of maternal affection."[39] She was perceived as unnatural by shirking a duty imposed upon her by Nature.

The importance of the role played by mothers in the education of their children carried a corollary, in that, of course, responsibility for an education run afoul could be laid at their feet. In Practical Education the Edgeworths exhorted that:

> It cannot be necessary to add more than this general idea that a mother ought to be answerable to her daughter's husband for the books her daughter reads, as well as for the company she keeps. 40

They also laid the blame for the exaltation of female accomplishments at the door of ambitious mothers, those females who excelled at "the art of rising in the world". 41 The view of the Edgeworths is clear.

> Without alarming those mothers who declare themselves above all things anxious for the rapid progress of their daughters in every fashionable accomplishment, it may be innocently asked what price such mothers are willing to pay for these advantages. "Any price within the limits of our fortune!" they would probably exclaim. 42

Thomas Day's Mrs. Merton in Sandford and Merton, although concerned about the education of her son, is a perfect example of the flighty, fashionable woman of the time whose social interests outweigh her maternal duties. Day points out in the moral tale that Mrs. Merton's days are spent in witty conversation and preparing herself for fashion, and her evenings spent at balls and giving entertainments. Her interests are fashionable dancing and manners. She has neither the time nor the inclination to participate personally in the education of her children. 43 Her character may be contrasted with that of Harry's mother, who discharges her duties as educator of her children and organizer of her household with great purpose.

Just as the Percival family in Belinda typifies the ideal middle to upper class family, the Sandfords are the ideal of the labouring poor. In this family it is the duty of Mrs. Sandford, "a very clean and decently dres´t woman" [44] to maintain the "small but clean-looking" house furnished with "plain but convenient furniture", [45] assisted by Harry´s sisters who are also "plain, modest and decent". [46] Day´s preoccupation with the simple and modest as an ideal lifestyle is not difficult to see.

Although it would appear that the duties of the wife in terms of the organisation of her household and the education of her children were serious ones indeed, it must be remembered that the authority given her was only a moral authority. The woman in the eighteenth middle class marriage gave up all legal power once she entered into a marriage. Her fate in life depended solely upon her husband´s wishes and, of course, her ability to make her husband want what she wanted.

It is probable that the female experienced a certain amount of stress created from her rather untenable position in marriage. She was given the responsibility of the nurture and education of the children, and the organisation of the household, but without any legal power or recourse should things go astray. Yet, it would appear that the Lichfield Circle held the opinion that most women of the eighteenth century should shun the politically active views of the radical-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft.

Nevertheless, Maria Edgeworth maintained in Letters for Literary Ladies that the argument against female education which cited female aggression and desire for power as a justification for avoiding female education was a totally false one. She states in the second letter that the truth is the exact opposite:

> The common fault of ignorant and ill-educated women is a love for dominion: this they shew in every petty struggle where they are permitted to act in private life. Power, supposing it to be a certain good to its possessor, is like all our other pleasures, capable of being appreciated; and if women are taught to estimate their pleasures, they will be governed in their choice by the real, not by the imaginary value. Power is an evil in most cases; and to those who really wish to do good to their fellow-creatures, it is at best but a painful trust. 47

Maria's opinion of power as related to the role of women in society reflected the accepted view that the separation of women from political power enabled them to remain pure, unsullied by its corrupting influence. This attitude became more deeply entrenched in the nineteenth century as the conceptualisation of the ideal woman as the ideal wife and homemaker solidified. By the mid-nineteenth century the image of appropriate womanhood precluded entirely a life in commerce or politics. The doctrine of separate spheres had become so firmly established that it was only by disappearing entirely from public view that a woman retained her purity and reputation.

The better educated a girl was, the greater was her understanding of the world, and therefore, the greater her own happiness in domestic life. Although the Lichfield Circle clearly viewed education as closely linked with domestic happiness, they were also aware of the difficulties associated with the female role in eighteenth century domestic life.

The novels of the eighteenth century clearly documented the lack of female financial control in marriage. Because there are no comments indicating any dissatisfaction with this scheme of things in the writing of the Lichfield Circle, it must be assumed that its members accepted this situation. Although they warned girls against the dangers of making an unwise marriage choice, they do not appear to have questioned the system itself.

A notable exception to this attitude, however, can be found in the example of Thomas Day, typically eccentric regarding the customs of his time. In 1780, after his disastrous attempt to ape societal niceties for the sake of pledging his troth first to Honora and then to Elizabeth Sneyd, and his equally disastrous experiment in the education of the ideal Sophie in the personage of the young foundling Sabrina Sydney, Thomas Day finally married Esther Mills. In the words of Miss Seward:

> He deigned to ask Miss Mills if she could, for his sake, resign all that the world called pleasures; all its luxuries, all its ostentation. If with him, she could resolve to employ, after the ordinary comforts of life were supplied, the surplus of her affluent fortune in clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, retire with him to the country, and shun through remaining existence, the taint of society. 48

She felt it of noteworthy significance to add that Day insisted that his wife's fortune be settled on herself, completely out of his legal control,[49] a further indication of the intensity of his principles and of the uniqueness of this kind of marriage arrangement.

It might be added that Day continued his educational experiments on his wife, insisting that she give up her domestics and her harpsichord. Miss Seward asserted that Mrs. Day never complained about her lot in the marriage as she had made her choice, and was, therefore, expected to live by it.[50]

With the evolution of middle class marriages based on true affection, the companionship function of a wife became, by the middle of the eighteenth century, as vital as her important role as a mother. In the eighteenth century companionate marriage, the woman was regarded as an appendage to the man - necessary and complementary to the fulfillment of his nature, but lesser. As Darwin stated in rhyming couplet, God had

> From Adam´s rib, who press´d the flowery grove,
> and dreamt delighted of untasted love
> To cheer and charm his solitary mind,
> Form´d a new sex, the Mother of Mankind.[51]

This companionship function of woman is reiterated in Darwin´s frequent use of such phrases as the "playful image" of women, and her "smiling enchantment on adoring Man".[52] It is clear from these lines that Woman´s place was beside her husband, to provide comfort, entertainment, and domestic joy, and certainly to defer to his more considered opinion in most matters, as was the intended purpose of Nature. Darwin stressed this matter but gave credit to the innate intelligence of women by commenting that "the wife may be superior and totally fulfill her possibilities in a married state only through that which the inactivity, folly, or death of a husband may render necessary".[53]

It is interesting to speculate where Maria Edgeworth stood on the issue of female equality in marriage. Although she never married, passing up her one offer of marriage from a Swedish gentleman, and electing through duty to remain in Ireland and help rear and educate the twenty-one other children of her father, she wrote about marriage in several of her novels. In Ennui she provided the reader with the acceptable version of the perfect domestic companion.

> With all her vivacity, she has a heart formed for tenderness, a high sense of duty, the best security for a woman's conduct; and in generosity and magnanimity, I never found her superior in either sex. In short, I never saw any woman whose temper and disposition were more likely to make a man of sense and feeling supremely happy. 54

However, there are indications in other of her works that she may have felt a certain hostility to this attitude of male supremacy, although her letters never indicate anything but the most reverential attitude toward her father who was the main male figure in her life, and who dominated and advised her always, even to the point of editing and prefacing her works long after she was an established and respected author in her own right. In Ennui she wrote:

> Who except Cupid, would barter his liberty for a butterfly? and Cupid was a child. Men nowadays are grown too wise to enslave themselves for women. Love occupies a vast space in a woman's thoughts, but fills a small portion in a man's life. Women are

> told that "The great, the important business of their life is Love"; but men know they are born for something better than to sing mournful ditties to a mistress's eyebrow! 55

She certainly seems to have been cognizant of the realities of life in the choosing of a mate among the members of fashionable society. Among the upper class in the eighteenth century, the choice was still made more often on the basis of financial concerns than on emotional involvement. True empathy could be felt for the girl who assumed she was chosen out of love, only to find later that her fortune was the main interest.

For the Lichfield Circle, the answer was not to overthrow the system, but to work effectively within it. Although Maria Edgeworth failed to make a definitive statement regarding the social inequities of the eighteenth century related to gender, she seems to be exhibiting some hostility to the situation in the following lines, spoken in sarcasm:

> It was a shame for her, being his wife, not to show more duty, and to have given it up when he condescended to ask so often for such a bit of a trifle in his distresses, especially when he all along made it no secret he married for money. 56

Her reply to the situation, instead of demanding a complete revision of the social system as Mary Wollstonecraft would have done, was one more tempered by the moderate approach. She cautioned against young girls being deceived by the attentions of young men who seem overly interested in girls who have acquired such female accomplishments as fashionable dancing.

> This race of beings are not particularly calculated to make good husbands in any sense of the word, nor are they usually disposed to think of marriage in any other light than as the last desperate expedient to repair their injured fortunes. 57

Given the close relationship between Maria and her father, it is probable that Maria's opinions coincided closely with those of her father. However, in a relationship where the power and influence were so one-sided, it is certainly likely that some degree of resentment was present on Maria's part, similar to the resentment often experienced on the part of the wife in her role in the companionate marriage.

In Ennui one of the characters laments being trapped in conversation by a "pompous bore".

> On this hint Lord Kilrush began a prosing dissertation upon smugglers and contraband traders, and talked to me a prodigious deal about exports and imports, and bounties, and the balance of trade. Not one word he said did I comprehend, and I question whether his lordship understood the subjects upon which he spoke so dictatorially; but he thought he succeeded in giving me an opinion of his wisdom and information. 58

Given the gregarious nature of her father, coupled with the reference to Richard Lovell Edgeworth made by Lord Byron in which Byron called him "the worst of all bores, a boisterous bore", 59 one can imagine Edgeworth as the model upon which the character of

Kilrush was based. Kilrush's personality is identical to how others described her father. If the characterisation of Kilrush was not an intentional caracature of her father, it may have been a Freudian slip.

Yet on the surface of her writing, she seemed to adhere to the accepted view of women's role in marriage. Her version of the ideal woman is reflected in the character of Leonora in The Bracelets, who shows restraint and is accustomed to yielding with grace. Maria even partially blamed women for their agreement to submit to the machinations of a society where "a degrading anxiety to attract worthless admiration" was seen as ultimately important. She commented also that as a result, it was not surprising that men considered themselves "the despotic judges, the arbiters of their (women's) fates." 60

This continued ambivalence toward the appropriate role for women, is a marked characteristic in Maria Edgeworth's work. She appears to understand the dangers of the system regarding women's place, yet cannot bring herself to defy it openly. Her ambivalence is also shown in her placing the blame for the system upon the propensity of the female nature for praise of beauty and manners.

Yet, although the role of the married woman was certainly an inferior one in eighteenth century English society, Miss Edgeworth viewed the single state as equally powerless in a society dominated by men. She wrote in Belinda of the plight of the single woman:

> She finds herself at six plus thirty a burden to her friends, destitute of the means of rendering herself independent... "de trop" in society... because she is unqualified to make the expected return for civilities, having no home... no house, etc. fit for the reception of a certain rank.[61]

Anna Seward did, however, remain single and one finds little regret in her writing concerning that state. Because she was head of her household, nursing for a time an invalid father, and having no siblings at home, she was able to maintain an independence which Maria Edgeworth was unable to achieve.

The Swan´s undeniable charm over the opposite sex coupled with her financial independence and her literary achievements allowed her to dominate relationships with her male acquaintances. Her correspondence with a George Hardinge is a case in point. She was eager to maintain the friendship over a long period of time, as long as his opinion of literary work agreed with hers. However, as soon as he disagreed with her on the talents of Milton, and dared to criticize her own poetic efforts, the friendship was quickly cut short.

E.V. Lucas, in writing on the life of Anna Seward maintains that this ability to dominate personal relationships and to determine their depth and length was possible for Miss Seward only because she was single. In a marriage, she would have been far less influential, having to shoulder many other more domestic responsibilities. As a married lady, much of her mystique would have disappeared, and her poetic talents being far inferior to her physical appearance and charm, would have been recognized to a far lesser extent. [62]

It must also be noted that the rise to prominence of figures such as Maria Edgeworth and Anna Seward were in the eighteenth century by far the exception rather than the rule. Their financial independence and literary talent allowed them this recognition. For the great majority of women, marriage was the only way to achieve some measure of financial security. The life of the paid governess was the only semi-respectable profession for the middle class girl who had not succeeded in the competition for marriage.

The writing of the members of the Lichfield Circle reflects to a great degree the general feeling of eighteenth century society that it was the responsibility of a single girl (and indeed, married women as well) to remain pure and above suspicion where matters of morality were concerned. Chastity above all was the rule.

Whereas the Evangelicals such as Hannah More claimed a scriptural basis for the necessity for purity on the part of the females, the followers of Rousseau cited as their guide his comments concerning the necessity for female reputation. In the Emile, Rousseau stated that moral goodness was important to the development of the male, but that reputation for moral goodness was vital for the female. The husband's confidence of his wife's fidelity was the link between him and his children, and therefore the basis for the entire societal structure. As Rousseau puts it:

> It is important, then, not only that a woman be faithful, but that she be judged to be faithful by her husband, by those near her, by everyone. It is important that she be modest, attentive, reserved, and that she give evidence of her virtue to the eyes of others as well as to her own conscience. If it is important that a father love his children, it is important that he esteem their mother. These are the reasons which put even appearances among the duties of women, and make honor and reputation no less indispensable to them than chastity. 63

Further to this responsibility, society laid at the feet of females the responsibility to try to inspire the male segment of society to greater heights of respectability and moral conduct. Failing this, women were at least expected to maintain the reins on men's baser instincts by refusing to succumb to temptation, thereby avoiding involvement in actions which would damage their own reputations and spoil their chances of making an advantageous marriage.

Priestley saw clearly the advantage in placing this responsibility on women with the ultimate aim of making society less lascivious and less prone to temptation.

> It is more in the power of the ladies than of anything that can be suggested to young men, either by myself, their friends, or their own reflections, to bring them into a right method of thinking and acting in this matter.[64]

Darwin added the opinion in A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education that "so great is the power of the softer sex in 'meliorating the characters of men; that, if such was their uniform behaviour," he doubted "not but that it would contribute to reform the morals of the age."[65]

Running throughout eighteenth century English society was an adherence to a concept of duty by both sexes, and it is obvious in the works of the Lichfield Circle. Most of the members of the group regarded marriage as a duty, one which they were willing to fulfill for a variety of reasons, Mr. Edgeworth fulfilling that duty four times.

Joseph Priestley certainly agreed with Edgeworth that marriage was a duty which all men should fulfill. 66 However, he also enumerated several of the advantages to men concerning the state of marriage. In a typically rational argument for faithfulness in marriage, he cited the care of children, the shame inherent on acts of adultery, and the motivating factors of care for a wife and family. 67 It is significant to point out his equation of "wife" and "children" as components in a marriage requiring the care of the male. He also stated:

> Marriage is moreover, of excellent use as a means of transferring our affections from ourselves to others. We see, not in extraordinary cases only, but generally, in common life that a man prefers the happiness of his wife and children to his own... In many cases, we see men risking their lives and even rushing on certain death in their defense. 68

As well, married men achieved "a principle of general benevolence, patriotism, and public spirit, which persons who live to be old without ever marrying are not generally remarkable for." 69

Maria Edgeworth maintained that the ideal marriage was one achieved within the confines of one´s own rank. She spelled out doom and disaster for those who married outside of their rank, as in the case of Sir Kit Rackrent in Castle Rackrent who committed the double sin of marrying a wealthy "nouveau riche" - a Jewess besides. She reiterated the theme of duty to one´s own family in accepting a planned, advantageous marriage in the example of Lady Geraldine in Ennui, and her assertion of a "distant hope that change in circumstance might one day render love and duty compatible". 70

* * *

The views of the members of the Lichfield Circle were definitely advanced for their day in all areas other than where women were concerned. Their educational works particularly show a more advanced understanding of the developmental process of children than had been formulated before the time of Rousseau. Their attempt to develop the Rousseauean philosophy into a practical science of pedagogy, including extensive work in the area of female education, represented an advance in thinking and an attempt to provide a rational basis for the education of females, a topic to be discussed more fully in the following chapters.

Where the role of women is concerned, however, their works fail to live up to one's expectations because of their inability to project their view of women beyond the fixed and rigid constraints of their society. The wide gap between their political radicalism and their conservatism where women are concerned raises the question as to the reason for the contradiction.

It is significant to point out that the Lichfield Circle was primarily male, and therefore expressed the male point of view. Even Maria, because of her close relationship with her father, followed suit and expressed the attitudes of the rest of the group. Given this male bias in their perception of their world, the Lichfield Circle's conservatism concerning women can be most properly explained using a model looking at the issue of the eighteenth century family from the male point of view.

The research which Lawrence Stone presents in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800 may provide a suitable explanation. He cites the evolution of the family from the Open Lineage family characteristic of the years 1450 to approximately 1630, developing into the Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear family, 1550 to 1700. Overlapping the second grouping somewhat was the development of the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family, from 1640 to 1800. It was in this closed nuclear family where grew the concept of what Stone refers to as "affective individualism".[71]

Affective individualism resulted in what Stone calls the eighteenth century companionate marriage, based upon affective bonding. By the mid-eighteenth century, this affectively-bonded family was most characteristic of the middle class. The companionate marriage was based on affection between man and wife and between adult and child. It was in this companionate marriage where the notion of extended family was curtailed, and where emotional support for the members of the family originated within the family unit. The family unit became more insular and more self-aware.

Characteristic of the nuclear family was the increasing amount of care given children. In this type of family structure, it is obvious that there must be a dedicated, nurturing mother. This may indeed go a long way to explaining why a group such as the Lichfield Circle could not conceive of any role for women other than that of wife and mother. The role of the mother was so central to the nuclear family that this kind of family could not exist without her to fulfill the all-important role of nurture within the parameters of it.

As will be documented in the following chapters concerning the views of the Lichfield Circle regarding female education, both domestic and boarding school, there is much to be admired in the work of these writers. The Lichfield Circle had the necessary qualities of personality and the skills of expression, as well as the social advantage of their position as a group of some considerable influence and opportunity in eighteenth century society. Had they also been able to resolve their ambivalence regarding the place of women in society arising out of eighteenth societal prejudices, they could surely have been true revolutionaries in the cause of female equality.

Footnotes

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Chapter 4 FEMALE EDUCATION WITHIN THE HOME

Erasmus Darwin commented in A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools that "the lady who possesses the virtue of compassion, cannot but be a good daughter, a good wife, and a good mother, that is, an amiable character in every department of life." [1] This statement succinctly summarizes the opinion of the Lichfield Circle in their conceptualisation of the role of women in eighteenth century society. Their perception of women as daughters, wives, and mothers is central to the kind of education they prescribed for females. Their goals of education were based on the intention to educate girls in order that they could become useful members of society, but only within the parameters of these roles. It should also be noted that the roles of the female as daughter, wife and mother are all defined with respect to their relationship with another individual, not as an accomplishment of their own development or achievement.

It is the purpose of this chapter to review the educational theory of the Lichfield Circle with respect to female education. It will present the rationale behind the operation of female education as it was discussed and practised in the eighteenth century, particularly as it applied within the domestic setting. The educational works of the members of the group were often criticisms of the general practises of the day and recommendations for change. This chapter will also chronicle the opinion of the Lichfield Circle with respect to some of the widely discussed educational issues of the day, specifically the importance of mothers in early educational development, the issue of governesses in female education, and the generally accepted custom of female education which consisted almost exclusively of female social accomplishments.

Although boarding school education will be discussed specifically in the following chapter, it must be noted that the theory underlying the Lichfield Circle´s views can apply to both realms of female education - the education offered within the home as well as that offered within the confines of a boarding school. However, education practised within the home tended to be of a more informal nature than the structured curriculum of the boarding school.

For the sake of convenience, the material referring to the more informal female education and the educational philosophy underlying it will be discussed in this chapter on home education, whereas the following chapter on boarding school education will detail the formal curriculum recommended for girls by the Lichfield Circle members.

According to the members of the Lichfield Circle, there were several publicly accepted justifications for proper female education. First, it was widely believed that education of both sexes was a means to the general improvement of society. Not only would education foster scientific improvements beneficial to the advancement of England, but it would benefit the country at large by a resulting decrease in the crime rate.[2] In a society where crimes against property were on the increase, and were dealt with most severely, it is little wonder that this justification for education of both sexes was held in some regard.

Besides the prevention of crimes, education was seen as important in the maintenance of the accepted social structure. Although the Lichfield Circle were rather radical in some of their political views, this conservative tendency in their desire to maintain a rigid class structure is extremely strong. Thus, Thomas Beddoes cautioned against using education "as an apprenticeship to the art of securing the blessings, and escaping the miseries" [3] fundamental to one´s position in life. This was a reference to the practice of the middle class parent to use the education of a daughter as a means to improving social position. Maria Edgeworth also complained about the use of education as a means of developing "the art of rising in the world", [4] an activity she found particularly pernicious in the case of women. Thus, although female education was often misused to advance one´s position in society, the implication was that appropriate education would be used for other more meaningful purposes.

On the more individual level, female education was intended to develop character. This character would manifest itself in the development of domestic virtues, which would be transposed into the development of good wives and mothers. In direct contrast to the Evangelical movement in the eighteenth century, whose predominant perception of human nature was based upon the belief in original sin, the Lichfield Circle perceived human nature to be essentially good, "infinitely more weak than wicked". [5] Properly developed virtues, abilities, and genius, however, were held to be more "the result of education than of nature". [6] This need to develop moral character through appropriate knowledge and training was a strong motivation for female education.

The concept of utility, although developed to the utmost by another contemporary theorist, Jeremy Bentham, was never far removed from the philosophy of education of the Lichfield Circle. Always a proponent of the improvement and development of his own family and society in general, Richard Lovell Edgeworth noted that "the love of the wonderful must yield to esteem of the useful" [7] and stressed the practicality of his methods of pedagogy. Joseph Priestley agreed with this notion, in that "the chief and proper object of education is not to form a shining and popular character, but a useful one". [8]

For Darwin, there was a need for female education in case of widowhood or marriage breakdown. He commented that "the wife may... totally fulfill her possibilities in a married state only through that which the inactivity, folly, or death of a husband may render necessary." [9] The implication here is that there was need for female education in case a woman may have to take control of the management of her family due to the loss of her husband. The corollary is, of course, that as long as she was married to a rational male, there was no need for her to worry about making major decisions in her life; they would be made for her by her husband, the real head of the household.

The ambivalence of Darwin in his attitude toward women is especially evident in the issue of female education. At times, he expressed reluctance to allow full capabilities and rights to women, as in the reference above. At other times, he was very much the champion of women and their right for intellectual development. In his treatise on female education he berated those in society who refused to educate women in a meaningful way.

> Some illiterate men [he wrote] have condemned the cultivation of the minds of the female sex, and have called such in ridicule learned ladies; as if it was a reproach to render themselves agreeable and useful. Where affectation is join´d with learning, it becomes pedantry, but this belongs oftener to the ignorant than to the cultivated. 10

The utility of a proper education was also commented upon by Beddoes in Hygeia, where he drew a contrast between the carefully educated and the well-educated,[11] the former being the girl who had undergone the typical female education of the day, consisting mainly of the social accomplishments, and the latter being the girl whose education had developed sound reason and moral judgment.

Given these sober and moral motivations for female education, it was unlikely that the typical education offered girls in the eighteenth century would satisfy the Lichfield Circle. Female education of the eighteeth century was hardly sober or sobering, and far from academic. The general thrust was to provide the middle class girl with "the education of a lady", [12] in order to define status and economic position, and hopefully to advance her position and the position of the family through making an advantageous marriage. If the whole intent of the education of a girl was to make her more pleasing to possible marriage partners, then obviously the course of study would be one which would serve to heighten her natural graces and abilities as a means of attracting a mate.

Thus, the thrust of female education was one in which the social accomplishments reigned supreme, other than in the tiny pockets of families where reason and utility held more sway, such as in the cases of the Wedgewood family, [13] or the families of the Lichfield Circle themselves.

Training in the social accomplishments consisted mainly in learning to sing and dance, to embroider and do other fine needlework, to be able to engage in polite conversation about a variety of suitable topics, and to speak some French or Italian. Academic pursuits were kept to a minimum, and reading usually consisted of light novels (much to the dismay of most educators of the time) and articles in women´s magazines.

The views of the Lichfield Circle are abundantly clear concerning the inappropriateness of this kind of education. Not only did they see this educational endeavour as frivolous; they refuted the utility of it for the purpose of social advantage, in that the acquisition of the social graces had become so hackneyed by all levels of society that they no longer were evidence of the status of "lady". On this subject, Maria and her father wrote:

> Parents are, and have been for some years, speculating in the same line; consequently the market is likely to be over-stocked, and of course the value of the commodities must fall. Every young lady (and every young woman is now a young lady) has some pretensions to accomplishments. She draws a little or she plays a little, or she speaks French a little. Accomplishments...are now so common, that they cannot be considered as the distinguishing characteristics of even a gentlewoman´s education. 14

Thomas Day certainly agreed with their scathing opinion of the social accomplishments. His opinion of the female sex was rather a negative one to say the least, viewing ladies as generally frivolous and trivial creatures interested only in their physical appearance and gay amusements. These were propensities which a faulty education only served to intensify.

Harry Sandford's father in Sandford and Merton speaks Day's mind in his assessment of females as "fine work indeed; (who) must have their hats and feathers, and riding-habits, their heads as big as bushels, and even their hind-quarters stuck out with cork or pasteboard." 15 Mr. Barlow notes that young ladies' fascination with London was due to the fact that "there they meet with infinite numbers, as idle and frivolous as themselves; and these people mutually assist each other to talk about trifles and to waste their time." 16

Day's scathing opinion of the nature of most females was illustrated by his assertion that the typical female education of the day served, not to enhance female virtues to the male population, but rather to detract from them, in that women educated under this regimen of so-called education could serve no useful purpose to any man of sound reason. He commented:

> We encourage a vicious indolence and inactivity, which we falsely call delicacy; instead of hardening their minds by the

> severer principles of reason and philosophy, we breed them to useless arts, which terminate in vanity and sensuality. In most of the countries I have visited, they are taught nothing of a higher nature than a few modulations of the voice, or useless postures of the body; their time is consumed in sloth or trifles, and trifles become the only pursuits capable of interesting them. We seem to forget, that it is upon the qualities of the female sex that our own domestic comforts and the education of our children depend. 17

This bitterness and total disgust are slightly ironic from a man who, in spite of his avowed distaste for the accepted customs of fashionable life, was willing to submit himself to a regimen of the exact same nature for the sake of his love for Elizabeth Sneyd, who was later to become the third wife of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In order to win her hand, Day promised to acquire the social graces so necessary to polite society. 18

Thomas Day´s failure in this area only served, no doubt, to intensify his attitude of contempt for the fashionable, the useless, and the immoral, and he blamed society´s preoccupation with these activities on the caprices of women.

> They will criticise the colour of his cloaths, his method of making a bow, and of entering a room. They will teach him that the great object of human life is to please and to be fair; and that the only method of doing it is to acquire the graces. 19

What Day failed to see was that the preoccupation of females with beauty and the social graces or trivialities, as he called them, was due in large part, not to their inherently trivial natures, but rather to the role which society placed upon them. The importance of marriage as the only viable option open to women as a lifestyle forced girls into the competition for a suitable mate, a competition in which a young lady was more likely to place well if she had developed her natural beauty and graces to the level which society demanded.

Erasmus Darwin also appears to have agreed with the views of the rest of the Lichfield Circle regarding the question of social accomplishments as part of female education, but with a greater degree of ambivalence on the issue. He too felt the need for academic education of girls, but there is some evidence of his wavering on the issue in that he appears to have accepted the notion that these little accomplishments enhanced the natural charms and femininity of girls. In his treatise on female education he documented the necessity of the refinement of good taste in girls, for "taste enters into their dress, their motions, their manners, as well as into all the fine arts, which they have leisure to cultivate; as drawing, painting, modelling, making artificial flowers, embroidery; writing letters, reading, speaking, and into almost every circumstance of life." [20]

Perhaps the issue of the enforced leisure of middle to upper class females is one which may be used to excuse Darwin somewhat for his ambivalent standpoint. It would appear that he understood perfectly the hours of leisure in a middle class woman´s life. There was some justification for adaptation of needlework and musical talents into the education of girls if these were to be used to fill hours of leisure.

Certainly the Edgeworths agreed with this notion. They documented society´s justification of the existence of accomplishments as "objects of universal admiration", as "tickets of admission to fashionable society", as "a resource against boredom", and as "a chance of a prize in the matrimonial lottery". [21] However, because of their understanding of the social realities in which they lived, they were prompted to write somewhat of a defence of the social accomplishments, providing that the pursuit of these skills was not the entire plan of education for girls, and providing also that the aim of amusements such as art, music, embroidery, or dancing was for the entertainment of the young lady herself, and not to advance her position within the social setting. They wrote:

> Women are peculiarly restrained in their situation and in their employments by the customs of society: to diminish the numbers of these employments would be cruel; they should rather be encouraged by all means to cultivate those tastes which can attach them to their home, and which can preserve them from the miseries of dissipation. 22

The same essay went on to quote the case of Madame Roland, a middle class Frenchwoman during the Revolution, who was forced to spend several months in prison before her execution. It was noted that she had been able to occupy herself by filling her hours with needlework and drawing, thus removing some of the tedium of the long hours.[23] The Edgeworths concluded therefore that "the study of the fine arts considered as a part of female education, should be attended to much less with a view to the acquisition of superior talents than with a desire to give women a taste for industry, the habit of application and a greater variety of employments."[24] Although their example of Madame Roland is a rather bizarre extension of the logic justifying the acquisition of needlework and painting as part of female education, the point itself is a sound one.

The social accomplishments were not totally worthless if one concentrated on such activities as dancing, according to Thomas Day, although he lamented that too often the dancing taught was less the exuberant country dance than the stately minuet.[25] Richard Edgeworth agreed that dancing was "an agreeable exercise, useful to the health and advantageous, as it confers a certain degree of habitual ease and grace."[26]

The stand of the Lichfield Circle on the issue of the appropriateness of the typical female education was, although not radical, at least a definitive statement. They were certain that the product of education under the existing system was far removed from their version of the industrious and thrifty ideal wife and mother. However, their reluctance to condemn the social accomplishments totally as an inappropriate component of female education indicates a certain ambivalence on their part. They appear to have desired change, but it is doubtful whether they ever questioned the social structure itself. That is not to say, however, that they failed to analyse the educational issues of their day with a critical eye.

In reaction to the general state of affairs concerning female education, the Lichfield Circle addressed several of the issues of the day in their works on education. One of these important issues pertaining to education within the home was the importance of the role played by the mother as part of the perception of the ideal woman as the ideal mother.

This concept was the result of Rousseau's influence for he had identified this role in La Nouvelle Héloïse through the character of Julie, the perfect mother. Julie perceives her role as one in which the pre-education of the children is undertaken by her in preparation for their formal education by her husband, or in some cases, the tutor. Using the garden metaphor so popular in relating to children and education in the eighteenth century, Julie remarks:

> I am only the servant of the gardener; I weed the garden and remove the bad plants; it is his part to cultivate the good ones. 27

This notion was repeated by Darwin in his treatise on female education by commenting that "the seeds of future virtues or vices are oftener sown by the mother than by the tutor." [28] In the same work he also stated that

> if female children are not treated with tenderness by a mother in their early years of infancy, they are perhaps liable to

> acquire a harshness of character and an apparent unfeelingness, which after renders them less amiable; though it may give them greater fortitude; which should therefore be inculcated at their rather maturer years."[29]

It is obvious that Darwin understood the importance of the early years on character formation, which was later documented by educational researchers.

Joseph Priestley agreed that the closest emotional bond was formed between mother and child if the mother undertook the early education of the child herself,[30] and Thomas Day imbued the whole question of early education with the sobering admonition that whoever "undertakes the education of a child, undertakes the most important duty in society, and is severely answerable for every voluntary omission."[31] There can be little doubt that the early education of children by their mothers was indeed a vital facet of education within the home.

Although the Lichfield Circle was adamant that the early education of children was most appropriately undertaken by mothers in order to form their characters properly and to complete the emotional bond necessary to the child's development, the group did allow that in many families the mother might be incapable of educating her daughters properly due to an insufficient education on her own part. In these cases, they allowed that the family might employ the services of a governess to undertake the education of girls. A distinction is made here between girls and boys in that after the pre-education of boys by their mothers in the Rousseauean style, boys were sent to boarding school or were educated by a tutor. The function of the governess was to undertake primarily female education.

The issue of the governess in eighteenth century society was one which was addressed by all educational theorists, and the Lichfield Circle was no exception. Their members manifested the suspicion of servants so common in their society, and it was a fact of life that the role of the governess in most English households was nothing more than that of a glorified servant, although her abilities and education could range anywhere on the educational scale from bare literacy to the academic excellence of any well-educated male tutor.

Priestley cautioned against leaving children under the influence of servants, [32] a warning which was reinforced by the Edgeworths in their assertion that children learn "language and manners, awkward and vulgar tricks " [33] from servants. Not only could children acquire low habits from servants, but equally undesirable, they could acquire a taste for needless finery from them. They noted that "the waiting-maid can inspire a taste for dress; the footman a taste for gaming, the coachman and groom, for horses and equipage; and the butler for wine". [34] The Edgeworths noted also that servants were not above using children for the purposes of their own entertainment and competition for status.

> Three or four maids sometimes produce their little dressed pupils for a few minutes to the company in the drawing room, for the express purpose of seeing which shall obtain the greatest share of admiration. This competition, which begins in their nurses' arms, is continued by daily artifices through the whole course of their nursery education. 35

This negative view of a class of people maintained in close proximity to the very children who were being protected is rather amusing when viewed from the twentieth century, but the phenomenon of the live-in domestic servant was a feature of the class structure of eighteenth century England, and nowhere is there a suggestion in the works of the Lichfield Circle that they wished to do away with this structure.

Although in many families the role of the governess was little elevated over that of other servants, the Edgeworths regarded the governess as "the friend and companion of the family" who must "consequently, have a warm and permanent interest in its prosperity", eventually becoming "attached to her pupils from gratitude to their parents, from sympathy, from generosity, as well as from the strict sense of duty." 36

Although they conceived few roles for women other than as wives and mothers, the Edgeworths were in agreement with the radical-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft in their assertion that work as governess should be regarded as an honorable profession, "without losing something of that respect, something of that rank in society which neither female fortitude nor male philosophy willingly foregoes." 37 In their view, though, a girl became a governess only if she had failed in the marriage competition, and required some means of self-support.

They recognized that the remuneration given governesses was usually below what they were worth, and asserted that a good governess should be paid equally to a good tutor.

> The reward which is given to women of abilities, and of unblemished reputation, who devote themselves to the superintendence of the education of young ladies in the higher ranks of life, the daughters of our affluent nobility, ought to be considerably greater than what it is at present; it ought to be such as to excite women to cultivate their talents, and their understandings, with a view to this profession. 38

Despite the lack of recognition often given the governess, the Lichfield Circle maintained that her role was of such importance in the formation of the proper attitudes of the children in her charge that great care should be taken in the choice. Ideal governesses should "pay the most exact and scrupulous attention to truth; they should not exaggerate trifling errors into reprehensible faults; and, where reproof is necessary, they should give it with kindness; and should not only punctually fulfill their own promises, tho´ to their own inconvenience, but exact the same from their pupils in return." [39]

As well, the ideal governess should be one who had true pedagogical skills. Moreover, "to make any progress in the art of education, it must be patiently reduced to an experimental science", [40] the basic educational premise of the Edgeworths. They recognized the worth of a good governess, in that "before any person is properly qualified to teach, he must have the power of recollecting exactly how he learned; he must go back step by step to the point at which he began, and he must be able to conduct his pupil through the same path without impatience, or precipitation." [41]

In contrast to the generally accepted custom of eighteenth century female education concentrating on the acquisition of socially useful skills, the Lichfield Circle tended to prefer a method of education which would produce a more well-rounded knowledge. Certainly they advocated the inclusion of academic pursuits, whether it be in domestic education or education in a boarding school. Although a more detailed picture of the prescribed curriculum for girls will be discussed in the next chapter, it must be noted here that the Edgeworths advocated the philosophy of teaching the whole child.

It was in this area that the Edgeworths particularly disagreed with the custom of the middle class family hiring a number of "masters" to complete the education of their daughters by instructing them in music, dancing, and drawing. They noted that "masters, even when they do the utmost that they engage to do, cannot educate their children; they can only partially instruct them in particular arts." [42]

Their view was that the acquisition of the social accomplishments was not true education, but only training in ornamental skills, a kind of "intellectual degradation", and stated that in education it was necessary "to rank mere mechanical talents below the exercise of the mental powers." [43]

The vanity of the masters could also foster competition and envy within the girl, vices which were particularly distasteful in the ideal woman.

> Thus the drawing-master has done his part, and is satisfied if he teaches his pupil to draw well; it is of no concern of his what her temper may be, any more than what sort of hand she writes, or how she dances. The dancing master, in his turn, is wholly indifferent about the young lady's progress in drawing; all he undertakes is to teach her to dance. 44

The Edgeworths advocated a well-rounded education for girls, one which included a knowledge of the laws of nature, mathematics, and literature. In Letters for Literary Ladies, Maria asserted the desirability of a girl's education providing her with a solid understanding of fewer subject areas rather than the smattering of surface knowledge on a wide variety of topics deemed necessary to engage in polite conversation. Although the message was advanced for the day, the motivation prompting it was not. Although she was advocating academic knowledge as desirable, she was prompted by the motivation of making the woman a pleasing companion to her husband.

On the other hand, however, Miss Edgeworth noted that "women cannot precisely force the tastes of the person with whom they may be connected, yet their happiness will greatly depend upon their being able to conform their tastes to his."[45] For this reason, it was necessary to take the middle road, avoiding the temptation to dwell completely in one area of intellectual pursuit.

> For this reason, I should rather, in female education, cultivate the general powers of the mind than any particular faculty. I do not desire to make my daughter a musician, a painter, or a poetess; I do not desire to make her a botanist, a mathematician or a chemist; but I wish to give her the habit of industry and attention, and love of knowledge and the power of reasoning; these will enable her to attain excellence in any pursuit of science and literature. 46

It would appear that Erasmus Darwin disagreed on this issue, for he noted that it was preferable to read short selections on a wide variety of topics because "the business of polite education is to give the outline of many species of erudition, or branches of knowledge; which the young ladies may cultivate further at their future leisure without the assistance of a teacher, as may best suit their tastes or their situations."[47]

This appears to be in direct contrast with the general view of education as expressed by the other members of the Lichfield Circle. This ambivalence of Darwin has been discussed previously; it may be sufficient to comment that Darwin´s view of women was such that he was unable to perceive of women as truly intellectual creatures. Although he admitted the need for female education and their ability to acquire a more academic education, he was caught up in the definition of the nature of woman as defined solely through her function with respect to males.

In summary, it would appear that the views of the Lichfield Circle regarding eighteenth century educational issues were advanced for their time. Contrary to the accustomed custom of hiring specialists in dancing and languages, they recognized the need to teach the whole child. Although their perception of the ideal woman was closely bound up with the concept of marriage and motherhood, their comments concerning the vital role of the governess as teacher and moral influence state an early case for the professionalization of teachers. Central to this issue is their demand for an appropriate financial remuneration for the services of a good governess. This would reflect society's increased awareness of her worth.

Much of the education of girls within the home was of a more informal nature than that of a boarding school. A feature of this education was the degree to which she was apprised of the ways of the world. Although society accepted that girls should be sheltered and naive in their knowledge of men in order to keep them pure and chaste for marriage, the members of the Lichfield Circle could see the inherent danger in this approach. Priestley warned that some knowledge of men, on a theoretical rather than practical level of course, was wise because

> if women be forewarned of the deceitfulness and artifices of men, they will be guarded against seduction, and will not fail to take the advice of their guardians and friends before they put themselves into their power. 48

Literature played a large part in the informal education of a girl educated within her own home. Prescribed literature was intended to aid the young lady in the development of the virtues and attitudes which would allow her to take her place one day in the role which Nature intended for her. The link between reading material and virtue was so strong that the Edgeworths stated that:

> by unremitting, scrupulous caution in the choice of the books which are put into the hands of girls, a mother or a preceptress may fully occupy and entertain their pupils, and

> excite in their minds a taste for propriety, as well as a taste for literature. It cannot be necessary to add more than this general idea, that a mother ought to be answerable to her daughter´s husband for the books her daughter reads, as well as for the company she keeps. 49

A large portion of the reading material of young ladies consisted of novels. Novels were considered by many educational theorists to be the bane of good education and extremely detrimental to the development of virtue. Indeed, many of the novels of the eighteenth century were quite erotic in nature. Erasmus Darwin divided novels into three basic categories - serious, humorous, and amorous. [50]

Of these categories, he totally disallowed the amorous novels, fearing that they would "inflame the passions". [51] His recommendation was for the serious novels such as Sandford and Merton, more a moral tale than a novel, and the works of Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. However, in the case of the Burney novels, he cautioned that the more risqué passages would have to be edited by a discriminating mother or governess to guard the innocence of the young lady.

Again, typically contradictory with regard to this issue, Darwin commented in favour of the novel as a means to ensure that girls were forewarned of the dangers of making a bad marriage choice, based on a naive attitude concerning men.

> And how can young women... who are secluded from the other sex from their infancy, form any judgment of men, if they are not to be assisted by such books, as delineate manners? - A lady of fortune, who was persuaded by her guardian to marry a disagreeable and selfish man, speaking to her friend of the ill humour of her husband, lamented, that she had been prohibited from reading novels. "If I had read such books", said she, "before I was married, I should have chosen better; I was told that all men were alike except in respect to their fortune." 52

Darwin advocated a literary education, but cautioned against the over-use of novels, in that "the acquirements of literature and of many arts, make the lives of young people too sedentary; which impairs their strength, makes their countenances pale and bloated, and lays the foundation of many diseases." 53

For the Edgeworths the danger of the novel lay not only in the moral issue involved, but also in the fact that the novels of the day often failed to deal with reality. For the Edgeworths, appropriate female education was based on the concept of reality at all times. It was necessary for a governess or mother to educate a girl with the facts, whether in science, literature or domestic necessities. The romances portrayed in novels often "diminished the sensibility of the heart", 54 and although pity and charity could be taught through the use of moral tales, these concepts tended to be over-worked in novels to the point where the situations were no longer plausible. [55]

However, they did recommend adventure stories for girls, assuming that "girls must soon perceive the impossibility of their rambling about the world in quest of adventures." [56] It would appear that the adventuresome nature of books such as Gulliver´s Travels and Robinson Crusoe were so far beyond the realm of possibility for the eighteenth century young lady that there was no danger of her receiving the wrong message from them.

This same preference for reality in education and in particular in the novels appropriate for the use of young ladies can be documented in Darwin´s work where he admonished that "in private education, least a preference of fiction to truth should be thus instill´d, the ridiculous passages with which even the best novels abound, should be carefully pointed out by a friend or governess; with their exaggerations, improbabilities, and frequent deviations from nature." [57]

Reading novels might also both raise the expectations of girls and destroy their sensibilities. These dangers were to be carefully avoided, if female education was to achieve its purpose of creating ideal wives and mothers. Thus, the over-use of novels was to be discouraged

> not only because such readers are liable to acquire a romantic taste; and to return from the flowery scenes of fiction to the common duties of life with a degree of regret: but because the high-wrought scenes of elegant distress display'd in the novels have been found to blunt the feelings of such readers towards real objects of misery. [58]

Therefore, the purpose of education was to instill in girls, not only a sense of the practical and real in contrast to the imagined and romantic, but was also intended to develop a sense of benevolence to be used in favour of objects deserving of their pity.

The education of young ladies in their own homes was viewed by the Lichfield Circle as often leading to excessive pampering, a contrast to the rather stringent and harsh conditions found in the typical boarding school of the day. Influenced by Rousseau, they felt that the tender nature of young girls should be tempered by experiences leading to fortitude and the strength to bear the many distresses life would deal them.

Fortitude was to be developed through a gradual process of hardening in girls. Although this hardening process was discussed by both Locke and Rousseau, it was Thomas Day who carried it to extremes in his attempts to accustom his protégée Sabrina Sydney to physical discomfort and to fears of physical harm.

> His experiments had not the success he wished and expected. Her spirit could not be armed against the dread of pain, and the appearance of danger. When he dropped hot sealing wax upon her arms she did not endure it heroically, nor when he fired at her petticoats pistols which she believed to be charged with balls, could she help starting aside, or suppress her screams. 59

Although this method was perhaps more harsh than need be, Darwin and Priestley also recommended in their works on education that girls be conditioned to a life where physical comfort was not always possible, through the cultivation of compassion tempered by "fortitude to bear the sight of such irremediable evils as the accidents of Life must frequently present before their eyes." 60

The curriculum of female education offered within the home tended to be of a more domestic nature than that of a boarding school. The Edgeworths recommended a curriculum which was rather science-oriented, no doubt because of the intense interest in science of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, but also because in science he saw the order and laws of Nature. Thus, in Practical Education, Edgeworth recommended a study of chemisty. He made the study of chemistry of practical use to girls through the assertion that cooking was simply domestic chemistry.[61] The same was true of the domestic art of dyeing, which involved a knowledge of evaporation, crystallation, and saturation.[62]

The Edgeworths in particular recommended learning through the use of exploration and experimentation. However, this exploratory approach was to be applied more intensively to the education of boys. They warned that

> in the education of girls we must teach them much more caution than is necessary to boys; their prudence must be more the result of reasoning than of experiment; they must trust to the experience of others, they cannot always have recourse to what ought to be, they must adapt themselves to what is. 63

Of course, this contradiction between the appropriate educational style for girls as opposed to that of boys is certainly an indication of the influence of Rousseau, particularly his comments regarding the necessity for Sophie to guard her reputation. Experimentation on the part of girls could lead to seduction, and a girl´s honour and reputation were her greatest advantage in that society.

As has been stated, a large part of the education of a young lady within her own home was of an informal nature. Much of the education administered to her in childhood was a result of the attitudes of her parents and their economic position in society. As P. Miller indicates in The Education of a Lady, this unintentional education was of a nature more difficult to duplicate between families.[64]

Certainly religion was one of the facets of unintentional education. Religion could play a most vital role as in the education of Evangelical children, or could play a relatively minor role in other families, depending upon the religious values of the family involved.

The case of the Lichfield Circle with respect to religion in education is an interesting one, for as one would expect in the case of an intellectual group of theorists leaning heavily toward the sciences and reason, religion played little role in their daily lives, and even less in their educational works. That is not to say that these were not moral people, quite to the contrary. In reply to several criticisms that Practical Education had detailed every facet of the education of a child, but had excluded religious training, Maria and her father replied in the Preface to the second edition of that book that their intention was to provide "a system of education, founded upon morality exclusive of religion".[65]

This failed to satisfy the Evangelicals, who continued to publish critical commentaries on the godlessness of the Edgeworth education. In a second attempt, which appears to be more of an effort at conciliation than the actual facts, the Edgeworths noted that because they lived in Ireland at the time of writing the educational work, and because of their role as Protestants in a Catholic land, they avoided the topic of specific religion in order that their system of education could be adopted by members of either religion.[66]

However, research into the private lives of the Edgeworths would appear to indicate that organized religion played little if any role in their domestic life. There is no indication that prayer was a feature of their lives or deaths. The letters of Richard Lovell Edgeworth on the numerous deaths of wives and children are letters celebrating life, and lack any scriptural reference. The same might be said of Erasmus Darwin, who advocated moral education without an expressed need for religious education.

Thomas Day appears to have fit this pattern fairly well, although there is evidence that he was more religious than Darwin. Like Darwin, his code of ethics in life demanded a deep morality. He demonstrated a continued selfless charity to others in the form of loans which were seldom repaid. [67] One of his biographers, George Gignilliat, Jr. states, however, that Day also ministered spiritually to the poor of his area through prayer meetings in his home during which he lectured on the moral principles set forth in the gospels. [68]

Joseph Priestley appears to have held more definitive views regarding religion. In spite of the fact that he was trained as a Dissenting minister, there are not many references to scripture in his scientific treatises. However, he did attach a religious significance to the concept of marriage in his Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education. [69] In the same work, he devoted an entire chapter to the evils of debauchery and fornication in young men, using a scriptural basis for his argument. [70] In his later years, Priestley became much more devoted to writing on religious topics, but because his educational publications were made in earlier life, they are not representative of the religious commitment he felt in his old age . [71]

To summarize, then, the members of the Lichfield Circle expressed considerable disgust with the eighteenth century preoccupation with female education consisting of the acquisition of social accomplishments, viewing these skills as more often damaging than rewarding to the development of the ideal woman. Their preference was for an education which would mould a young lady into her appropriate role in society as a wife and mother. The more definitive prescriptions as applied to curriculum remain to be seen, and these will be detailed in the following chapter, which concerns female education in the boarding schools of eighteenth century England.

Footnotes

1. Erasmus Darwin, A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968) Reproduced in facsimile from original (Derby: J. Johnson, 1797), p. 47.

2. Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Essays on Practical Education, 3 vols. (London: R. Hunter, Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1815), 1:290.

3. Thomas Beddoes, Hygeia, Essays Moral and Medical (Bristol: R. Phillips, 1806), Essay I, p. 23.

4. Maria Edgeworth, Belinda, 2 vols. (London: Whittingham & Rowland, 1810), 1:1.

5. Thomas Day, The History of Sandford and Merton, 3 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), reproduced in facsimile from original (London: J. Stockdale, 1783), 3:12.

6. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:410.

7. Ibid., 2:221.

8. Joseph Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education (Bath: R. Cruttwell, for J. Johnson, 1778), pp. xiii-xiv.

9. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 11.

10. Ibid., pp. 39-40.

11. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay I, p. 59.

12. Peter J. Miller, "The Education of the English Lady, 1770-1820", (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1969), p. v.

13. Ibid, p. 155.

14. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:183-4.

15. Day, Sandford and Merton, 3:301 - 2.

16. Ibid., 2:102.

17. Ibid., 3:206.

18. Accompanied by Edgeworth, Thomas Day travelled to Lyons in 1771 where he engaged the services of the finest fencing and dancing masters in France. For the duration of nearly a year, "he practised the military gait, and the fashionable bow, minuets and cotillions." He attempted also to to modify the shape of his legs, to make them more elegant, by standing "daily an hour or two, in frames to screw back his shoulders, and point his feet." For hours he stood, "his feet in the stocks, a book in his hand, and contempt in his heart." Unfortunately, the experiment failed, as Elizabeth Sneyd rejected him in spite of his efforts to improve his social graces. See Anna Seward, _Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin_ (London: T. Bensley, for J. Johnson, 1804), p. 43, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, _Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth_, 2 vols. (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969), reproduced in facsimile from original (London: R. Hunter, and Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 1820), 1:260 ff.

19. Day, _Sandford and Merton_, 1:34.

20. Darwin, _Conduct of Female Education_, p. 25.

21. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, _Practical Education_, 2:171.

22. Ibid., 2:175.

23. Ibid., 2:181.

24. Ibid.

25. Day, _Sandford and Merton_, 2:278.

26. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, _Practical Education_, 2:193.

27. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, _The Minor Educational Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau_ (London: Blackie & Son, 1910; reprint ed., New York: Bureau Publications, Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 74.

28. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 93.

29. Ibid., p. 55.

30. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 83.

31. Day, Sandford and Merton, 1:32.

32. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 56.

33. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:155.

34. Ibid., 1:152.

35. Ibid., 1:155.

36. Ibid., 2:209.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 52.

40. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:iii.

41. Ibid., 2:201.

42. Ibid., 2:204.

43. Ibid., 2:199.

44. Ibid., 2:204.

45. Maria Edgeworth, Letters for Literary Ladies (Georgetown: Joseph Mulligan, 1810), p. 43.

46. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

47. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 39.

48. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 149.

49. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:213.

50. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 33.

51. Ibid., p. 33.

52. Ibid., p. 34.

53. Ibid., p. 68.

54. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:428.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid. 1:431.

57. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 35.

58. Ibid., p. 37.

59. E.V. Lucas, A Swan and her Friends (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), p. 92.

60. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 50.

61. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:33.

62. Ibid., 1:34.

63. Ibid., 1:393.

64. Peter J. Miller, "Education of the English Lady", p. 141.

65. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1: xii.

66. Ibid., 1: vii.

67. George Gignilliat, Jr. The Author of Sandford and Merton, A Life of Thomas Day, Esq. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 24.

68. Ibid., p. 252.

69. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. ix.

70. Ibid., p. 181.

71. Wallace Ruddell Aykroyd, Three Philosophers (London: William Heinemann, 1935; reprint ed., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 214.

Chapter 5 BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATION

> Sentiment and ridicule have conspired to represent reason, knowledge, and science, as unsuitable or dangerous to women; yet at the same time wit, and superficial acquirements in literature, have been the object of admiration in society; so that this dangerous inference has been drawn almost without our perceiving its fallacy, that superficial knowledge is more desirable in women than accurate knowledge. This principle must lead to innumerable errors; it must produce continual contradictions in the course of education; instead of making women more reasonable, and less presuming, it will render them at once arrogant and ignorant; full of pretensions, incapable of application, and unfit to hear themselves convinced. 1

This scathing commentary concerning the inadequacies and fallacies surrounding the field of female education was part of the Edgeworth´s treatise Practical Education. This work and other educational works by the members of the Lichfield Circle served to document what was wrong with female education as it was practised in the eighteenth century, not only as it was carried out within the confines of the home, but in boarding schools as well.

This chapter will focus upon the opinions of the members of the Lichfield Circle as they related to the operation of female education in boarding schools, and their recommendations for the specific curriculum to be followed in that education.

The boarding school for young ladies was a seventeenth century innovation. [2] Although it is very difficult to estimate exact numbers of these institutions, it is supposed that their numbers increased steadily as the middle class became more affluent. Certainly by the end of the eighteenth century the wealth of critical commentaries concerning the unhealthy atmosphere of these institutions would lead one to expect that they enjoyed a great popularity, for their detractors "who, suddenly becoming aware of what they felt to be a most unhealthy educational development, poured abuse upon them and revealed their many shortcomings to unwary parents." [3]

Although exact figures are impossible to determine, there is little doubt that the eighteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the incidence of boarding school education for young ladies. Any research into female education cites statistics indicating that numerous boarding schools dotted the English landscape. Typical figures are those of the town of Brighton which, by the early nineteenth century, contained over 100 female boarding schools although the general population was only approximately 40,000. [4]

Given the many instances cited by critics such as the Lichfield Circle of the inadequacies and evils of boarding school education, it is difficult to understand why the practice remained so firmly entrenched. The most rational answer must lie within the parameters of social structure. The middle class attempted to purchase for their daughters "the education of a lady" [5] by copying what they perceived to be the educational practices of the upper classes, in order to make their daughters more likely to attract a mate of good quality and social position.

This percolating effect of customs and educational practice operated to a great degree within classes lower than the leisured middle classes. If population statistics are compared to boarding school enrollments, [6] one can readily see that there must have been great numbers of the lower middle orders sending their daughters to boarding schools of lower quality and cheaper enrollment fees. There were simply not enough leisured middle class girls to fill the numbers of institutions in operation at the end of the eighteenth century.

The numbers of female boarding schools in eighteenth century England bore solid witness to the popularity of a particular kind of female education.

It is true that the education experts of the age condemned these institutions, citing their laxity in the areas of the physical well-being of boarders to their inadequacy in both academic and moral training. However, because of the middle class obsession with upward social mobility supposedly resulting from "the education of a lady", the critics' views were indeed a cry in the wilderness.

The members of the Lichfield Circle joined many other critics of the day in their evaluation of the operation of these schools. Although it must be noted that the schools themselves ranged from very expensive to relatively cheap, they shared a common regimen regarding female education. If domestic education was faulted because of its tendency to pamper and spoil at times, boarding school education was the exact opposite. The routines of most boarding schools were viewed as rigid, harsh, and unhealthy. Besides these faults, the Lichfield Circle viewed the typical boarding school as failing to provide an adequate education for girls, filling the day with the pursuit of useless accomplishments instead of allowing girls to learn academic material similar to the typical male education.

The typical boarding school was criticised by Thomas Beddoes particularly because of its unhealthy atmosphere. As part of the research for his book, he conducted extensive interviews of young ladies who had attended boarding schools of various levels of expense and social standing, and found that the regimen of these schools was very harsh, noting that as a result, the physical health of girls was seen to decline after admittance to school.[7] His studies traced female illness in later years to an origin in these kinds of institutions where food was scarce and of poor quality, heating inadequate, and over-crowding severe.

In questioning young ladies concerning their experiences and treatment in various boarding schools, he discovered that the following response was typical.

> Rose at six in summer, seven in winter - all who learned music, practised in winter for two hours before breakfast - in summer all, except the puny and sick, walked for an hour - six hours interval between breakfast and dinner, but each ... had a large piece of bread at twelve. Out of school hours, in fine weather, an hour´s walk, two and two, before dinner, and another before supper - in foul weather used the dumb bells, or played about in the dancing room. The rest of the

> time out of school hours, practised the lessons appointed by the several teachers. Feet generally cold in winter; there were constant good fires in the school room, but the streams of air from the doors were chilling. Chilblains common, particularly on the fingers. 8

In fact, Beddoes considered the general regimen so harsh and debilitating for a variety of reasons which will be discussed here, that he considered a group of young ladies subjected to boarding school education as having the same degree of health, (or one should rather say lack of health) as a group of young girls of the labouring classes set to work for three years in the cotton mills of Lancashire. [9]

He found it particularly vicious that lunatic asylums, although certainly not pleasant places in the eighteenth century, were subject to government inspection, while institutions where young women were supposedly educated and cared for, were not. [10]

It was a generally accepted fact that girls in boarding schools of the eighteenth century were underfed, both in quality and quantity of nourishment. This was particularly disapproved of by the Lichfield Circle and other writers concerned about the education of girls. Certainly Erasmus Darwin noted this phenomenon in his comments concerning the danger of the common custom of punishing recalcitrant girls through withdrawal of their food.[11] Beddoes noted the tendency to underfeed girls, both as a misplaced concern to maintain their figures and as a lucrative method of amassing a fortune on the part of the governess, as the head teacher was called.[12] In his documentation of case studies, he noted several cases of girls suffering from "the faintness, internal sinking, and consequent loathing of food, which too long abstinence has induced."[13] In the modern context, these are known to be symptoms of metabolic distress associated with near starvation.

Beddoes´ studies also indicated that he had

> heard it related by many mothers, that after a residence of some months at school, a periodical function, peculiar to the female frame, has ceased altogether, or run into excess. Either irregularity will follow the action of continued cold. 14

Although Beddoes´ assertion that the ammenorhoea common among girls while at school was a result of the drafty conditions was correct in part, it has more recently been discovered that the condition is also a feature of the female body suffering from malnutrition.

A significant portion of the diet in a boarding school consisted of bread and butter and tea. Although the members of the Lichfield Circle and many other writers of the age constantly advised against the practice of allowing children to drink strong tea, the custom appeared to hold fast.

Thomas Beddoes based his argument against the custom by citing results from experiments he had performed upon frogs, in which he injected individual solutions of tea, opium, and various other ingredients into the hearts of frogs to determine their effects. He noted that "laurel water, infusions of opium, of digitalis, and green tea bear equal rank, with regard to their destructive effect upon the hearts of frogs and toads - all rendering them instantaneously incapable of pulsation."[15] Found to be far less poisonous were infusions of hops, cayenne, and several other drugs in use during the eighteenth century. He summarised his argument by stating that large doses of strong tea would cause "a wild vivacity, excessive flushing, a full quick pulse, with watchfulness, followed by deep sleep and heaviness next day."[16] Nevertheless, the custom prevailed, for tea was a cheaper and more convenient substitute than fresh milk in an age where refrigeration was difficult if not impossible.

If the diet of the boarding school was likely to usurp the health of a student in attendance, the drafty and cold conditions were certain to continue the process.

> In winter, the nine, ten, or twelve tedious hours of school and of preparation for school, particularly the former, were, in a greater or less degree, an uncomfortable, chilly, shivering season; leaving upon the memory, a strong, painful impression, and a worse upon the system. 17

That the schools were generally too cold for comfort is well documented in a number of references to these conditions on the part of boarding school critics of the time. Erasmus Darwin correlated the months of highest mortality rates in London's general population with the cold during the winter months, [18] thereby citing the cold as a cause of general ill-health. Thomas Beddoes cited the cold as a more common cause of illness in the boarding schools than their abysmally poor dietary practices. [19]

Besides the incidence of ammenorhoea cited above, the cold was a cause of the chilblains referred to in every young girl's diary of her school days. The commonality of the condition is borne out by the fact that Beddoes mentions that in some cases the school hired a person "to dress the chilblains with opodeldoc - they were very common." [20]

The prevalence of cold conditions often meant over-crowding in the dormitories of the schools. Two girls to a bed was the rule, being both cheaper and warmer, a condition which Darwin seems to accept as normal. [21] The resulting incidence of sexual exploration was a feature of boarding school education, although it is addressed at much greater length by evangelical writers than by the Lichfield Circle. There are, in fact, only a few veiled references in Beddoes' work to the pernicious effects of masturbation and exploration among girls, and none at all in the work of Darwin and the Edgeworths.

Although medical men such as Thomas Beddoes and Darwin criticised the boarding schools for the cold conditions, they did not mean for girls to avoid the fresh air. Darwin stated that "to strengthen delicate children, they should be encouraged to go into the cold air of winter frequently, but they should not remain in it longer than a quarter or half an hour at a time." [22] As well, he recommended that the tops of doors should be sawed off to provide adequate ventilation in the dormitory rooms without allowing in cold drafts. [23] He recommended also that bed curtains should be left open at night, to promote the circulation of fresh air. [24]

Another feature of boarding school life guaranteed to keep doctors wealthy, in that "medical men have few better patrons", [25] was the lack of physical activity among the girls. Thomas Day and the Edgeworths recommended an education supplemented by plenty of physical exercise, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, the physical activities of girls in boarding schools were very limited. In fact, as Beddoes noted, "the greater part of the movements of girls at boarding schools, no one, who has any regard to propriety of language, will characterise by the name ´exercise´." [26] Although the daily routine usually included several walks two by two in the company of a female instructress, Beddoes discounted these "dead marches" [27] as having any salutary effects upon physical health.

He noted that "sedentary occupations gradually destroy the desire, and impair the power, to exert the muscles, more particularly while they are forming." [28] He also blamed the lack of real physical exercise with causing the girls to suffer from "their indigestions, their inappetence, their unrefreshing sleep, their morning mawkishness, and their all-day-long ennui". [29] In other words, the lack of physical activity resulted not only in physical debilitation, but it also was reflected in personality and mood alterations.

Erasmus Darwin advocated exercises which would "promote the growth of the person in respect to height" rather than those which "render the system more robust and muscular." [30] Among the activities he deemed suitable were playing ball, shuttlecock, swinging and dancing. Lifting light weights was suitable exercise, as was the ringing of a heavy bell. [31]

The boarding schools were criticised not only because of their poor track record in maintaining the physical health of their students. Critics of the day also were unhappy with the notion that boarding schools were being used as a means of social mobility. It was generally believed by society that each rank was enrolling its daughters at schools above its own in order to emulate the manners of the rank above them. How true this was, is difficult to determine exactly. Certainly, there was some apeing of one´s betters in the purchase of "the education of a lady" [32] but the price affixed to the admission of a boarding school often determined its clientele. Therefore, there is little possibility that any great amount of social mobility was achieved by boarding school education.

Although the Edgeworths definitely preferred private education to that of the boarding school, Maria cited this emulation of one´s higher ranks as one of the few advantages to public education. She noted that a good boarding school could "efface the rusticity" of the daughter of upwardly mobile parents, but that in order for this to be achieved, a large, exclusive school must be selected.[33] The small, locally run boarding school would not do.

Those who preferred private education also cited as a point in their own favour the tendency of children to ape one another - in negative qualities as well as positive ones. Citing the fact that "emulation is a stimulus of exceedingly disputable quality"[34] Beddoes admonished that

> school education is said to derive an advantage from the propensity of children to imitate those, who are a little older than themselves. Bad examples being apt to operate more powerfully than good; and being also more detrimental in their kind than the good are beneficial.[35]

Besides the inadequacies of the boarding schools regarding health of the students, and their propensity to allow for social mobility of the lower ranks, critics launched their attacks on the schools from the basis of the kind of education provided for the money paid. Certainly the members of the Lichfield Circle contributed to these attacks, for the education provided in boarding schools was so far removed from the educational philosophy of the naturalists that it was unrecognizable as anything approaching a worthwhile endeavour.

There were several practices totally condemned by the members of the Circle. Foremost among these was the practice of rote learning in boarding schools. In response to the typical practice of girls memorising from long lists of facts in abridged textbooks, Beddoes commented on the uselessness of "cramming the head with dose after dose of heterogeneous ideas". [36] The Edgeworths denied the necessity of a good memory in the acquisition of a good education, preferring a deep understanding of concepts to a superficial memorisation of myriad facts. [37] Neither did they admit the value of the speedy recall of memorised facts inflicted on girls in the typical boarding school education.

> The natural advantage of being able to associate ideas quickly is of little consequence, in comparison with the advantages that result from judicious cultivation. [38]

A second major failing of the boarding schools in the eyes of the Lichfield Circle lay in the inability of the large boarding schools to provide girls with a good working knowledge of running a household. "Domestic duties, the grand concern of every female", [39] were a priority of education in their eyes, in order for female education to achieve the expected result - the development of the young girl into a young woman who could fulfill her role in life, a role as a wife and mother. If the school failed to provide the young lady with the knowledge necessary to organise and supervise the operation of her own household, then any other skills she may have acquired were of little importance.

Basically, the views of the Lichfield Circle were that female education should be valuable, rewarding, reasonably enjoyable, and at the very least, comfortable. Unfortunately, a boarding school education was none of these. In their attacks on the schools of the day, they evinced a warm understanding of girls, in that they recommended shorter lesson times, noting that better learning is achieved if the attention span is taken into consideration when planning the lesson.

> To be good for body and mind, the lessons must be short. One or two experiments will generally be enough. The general inutility of lectures of all sorts, and the injury they occasion to children in particular, depends upon their excessive length. 40

They also turned their attention to the physical comfort of the girls during lessons, by commenting that desks with backs should be allowed [41] to provide some rest for the girls' backs. As well, Darwin recommended that writing lessons not be undertaken for long periods of time, for fear that it would cause poor posture and a stiffening of the shoulder muscles. In addition, he recommended that an inclined desk be used, similar to a draft table in modern usage. [42]

Certainly abhorrent to the Lichfield Circle was the typical practice of restraining female figures through the use of stays, a detestable custom which Darwin gratefully announced as having passed by 1797. It would appear that his information may have been outdated, for although the custom of whalebone stays was dropped during the freedom movement of the French Revolution, Beddoes cited in his case studies of girls in boarding schools of the late ´nineties that either stiff stays or backboards were worn. [43] Other girls documented the use of stays, although back boards had fallen into disuse in their particular schools. [44]

The attempt to alter the physical appearance of young ladies was not always confined to the use of stays or the backboard intended to improve posture. Indeed, during her days at Mrs. Davis´ school in upper Wimpole Street, the diminutive Maria Edgeworth had been swung by her neck for periods of time each day in an attempt to make her taller and to give her neck a more swan-like elegance. [45] Her biographer Isabel Clarke notes that the treatment failed to work, as Maria remained under five feet tall, and it is a wonder her neck wasn´t broken in the process.

To contribute to the comfort of students in school, Darwin recommended that warm baths be allowed the less robust students in an effort to preserve their more delicate conditions.[46]

Any research documenting daily life in a boarding school of the eighteenth century will cite a litany of punishments meted out for minor infractions of rules. Certainly Darwin agreed with the need for punishment in the case of recalcitrant girls, but he argued that the teacher, rather than withhold the nourishment of the offender, should attempt to "discipline through the superiority of the mind of the teacher over that of the pupil."[47] He also disliked the common practise of punishing through the use of the dunce´s cap or fools´ bells, commenting that they caused extreme humiliation, which in turn could "diminish the character of honour in the punished persons, sink their spirits, or render them insensible to the opinions of others, or injure their health."[48]

Although all members of the Lichfield Circle recognized the need for punishment on occasion, they disagreed concerning the timing and nature of this punishment. The Edgeworths stressed both the "immediacy and consistency of the consequence";[49] however, they recognized that the necessity of applying a punishment implied not so much a failure on the part of the student, but on the part of the teacher, in that "punishments are frequently the abrupt, brutal resource of ignorance to cure the effects of former negligence."[50]

The Edgeworths disagreed with Joseph Priestley in his opinion that punishment should be meted while the teacher or parent was still angry at the offence. Their view was that punishment could only be appropriately given when the teacher had achieved calm, for then the punishment would be of sufficient but not unreasonable severity, and the child would have had time to recognize his error.[51]

Very much in tune to the philosophy of John Locke, the Edgeworths and Darwin recognized that "blame and praise, if given very sparingly, will be found strong motives to the little pupils to perform their tasks well".[52] There was a definite need to communicate to children both "a love of credit, and an apprehension of shame".[53]

If rewards were to be used, they should be of an educational value in themselves. For example, needle cases, maps, books, and boxes of colours stimulate further learning. Rewards of money, jewellery, or wine were particularly unsuitable as they could become stimulants of greed instead of the love of reputation.[54] The Edgeworths agreed that rewards should be given sparingly, but if given, should represent the achievement in some tangible way.[55] A possible example might be a box of perfumed soap in reward for demonstrated cleanliness over a period of time.

From this discussion of the Lichfield Circle's criticisms of boarding school education it is clear that they were concerned about the physical well-being of girls. By documenting the inadequate nutrition and heating in schools they demonstrated a compassion and understanding untypical of their time. Their pedagogical theory indicates an understanding of child psychology. While they recognized the need for punishment on occasion, their approach was primarily a positive one. However, the underlying motivations for this criticism have yet to be discussed.

The curriculum of the typical boarding school was particularly detested by the Lichfield Circle. Not only did they consider wasted the thirty or so hours per week dedicated to the acquisition of "superficial acquirements",[56] but the activities themselves tended to raise one's tastes and expectations above "the numerous small, but not trifling pleasures of domestic life."[57] In effect, then, not only was this kind of education failing to provide the girl with the training which would allow her to fulfill the role Nature had intended - that of a wife and mother - but the very nature of the education would serve to make her wish to deny her intended role.

Although many of the recommendations of the Lichfield Circle were advanced for their day, one has to question the underlying motive for the suggestions. Their demand was for a curriculum of greater academic and practical substance; however, the motives for these changes were closely bound up with their restrictive view of the ideal woman as the ideal wife and mother. The Lichfield circle also considered that a good education would enhance the relationship between man and wife, an integral part of the eighteenth century companionate marriage. Therefore, when one views the recommendations of the Lichfield Circle with regard to female education from a twentieth century perspective, it is often a case of appropriate change for an inappropriate reason.

Their recommendations for a change in curriculum were numerous. They desired an education which would provide some useful and practical skills for the young ladies, as well as an education which was truly that - an academic education more similar to that of boys.

As a method of combatting the inactivity of young ladies in the schools, Beddoes recommended the implementation of garden plots, a system of cultivation which would incorporate physical exercise with a knowledge of "vegetable physiology". [58] Certainly Thomas Day agreed with this notion, as he had followed Rousseau´s example of the bean garden in his own Sandford and Merton, recognizing the salutary effects of gardening not only on physical health, but on the emotional state as well. [59]

As part of the program for physical health, Beddoes recommended one field trip per week, in small groups of five or six girls, similar to a family outing in domestic education. [60] These outings could provide real exercise, if conducted properly, and could also provide knowledge of nature and science.

Practical skills could also be introduced through the study of the mechanical arts such as the lathe. Although this idea might easily have been ascribed to having originated with Richard Lovell Edgeworth, surprisingly enough, this notion was one of Beddoes´. It was intended as a method of increasing female muscular strength, in an attempt to ward off disease through better fitness.[61]

In the academic subjects, the members of the Lichfield Circle commented at length on the positive and negative aspects of contemporary female education, and recommended change in many areas. However, they totally agreed with the practice of females avoiding the study of Greek and Latin. The Edgeworths felt that this was a wise move, as girls might "in translations which are acknowledged to be excellent, obtain a sufficient knowledge, without paying too much time and labour for this classic pleasure."[62] Maria also noted elsewhere that this avoidance of years of study of the classical languages also saved time in the education of young ladies, time which could be more wisely spent in acquiring important domestic knowledge.[63]

Erasmus Darwin recommended the study of French and Italian which were in vogue during the eighteenth century, for these languages were "not difficult to learn, and contain new books of taste and knowledge which are yearly publish´d in this age of literature".[64] The Edgeworths agreed with the view of Darwin, and it may be noted that Maria´s French was perfectly fluent, obviously a result of practicing what they preached. Thomas Day totally disagreed. His view was that women were not "birds of passage", and therefore, "every virtue can be learned and practised at home".[65] Because women would rarely visit foreign lands, there was no need to learn foreign languages.

One advantage of the boarding school was that it was a suitable environment for teaching foreign languages, according to Darwin. The girl would learn the language better from her peers because they "learn many other things, as well as languages, by repeating them to each other; and obtain what is seldom to be acquired from adult companions."[66]

The Lichfield Circle held that schools tended to teach grammar too early. They suggested that because grammar was an "abstract science" it would be better taught after some degree of fluency in the languages was achieved. As well, the grammar textbooks were seen as "tedious and defective compositions."[67]

Although the members of the group regarded rote memorisation as useless in most subject areas, they did agree that it was a necessary component in basic arithmetical facts.[68] Arithmetic was seen by the group as vital to a young lady in order that she could organize the budget of her own household one day. For this same reason, calculation and accounting methods were necessary in preparation for domestic use.

> Young women should be accustomed to keep the family accounts, and their arithmetick should not be merely a speculative science; they should learn the price of all necessaries, and of all luxuries; they should learn what luxuries are suited to their fortune and rank, and what degree of expense in dress is essential to a regularly neat appearance. 69

It would appear that Richard Lovell Edgeworth had developed a method of teaching arithmetic to children using what are now known as teaching aids, as Maria commented during a visit to France that it pleased her to see French children learning arithmetic, "using Papa´s little cubes".[70]

Although the Edgeworths and Darwin allowed the use of card-playing as part of female education in homes, it was not to be tolerated in boarding schools, in spite of their recognition that it was an excellent method of learning arithmetical facts. Darwin stated that in a school setting, "its effects on the passions cannot be sufficiently watched, and counteracted." [71]

Darwin recommended the study of geography before history. He stated that geography should be learned through the use of map work, globes, and astronomy. He noted the development of excellent geographical cards by his publisher, Joseph Johnson, and recommended them as excellent teaching aids in schools. [72]

The study of English history should precede that of world history, and should proceed from the general to the specific. He recommended the use of Priestley's chart of history, and cited several other excellent sources for young ladies studying history. [73] It must be noted that the method of learning history involved an understanding of the events, not simply the rote memorisation of long lists of dates of kings which comprised the general history lesson in a boarding school. Joseph Priestley, in an addendum to his proposed modernisation of male curriculum in which was recommended a practical approach to the study of law, commerce, and civil history, suggested that girls also study history, with a view to understanding that men were "more complex than polite conversation and the reading of novels would indicate." [74] The implication here is that female learning was to be achieved primarily for the purposes of providing suitable, stimulating conversation for men, another example of progressive pedagogical theory motivated by a restrictive view of the nature and role of the ideal woman.

It is interesting to observe the biases of the Lichfield Circle regarding female education. As much as they recommended total education for girls, they appear to have virtually ignored the realm of drama and poetry. Although Darwin allowed the reading of plays, he forbade girls performing them. Richard Edgeworth totally ignored drama and poetry during the first three of his four families. It was, rather, his inventive genius and scientific bias which were reflected in the education he provided for his children. Isabel Clarke makes the statement that in Maria Edgeworth´s tales, there are no fairies. The heroes are "philanthropic manufacturers, liberal noblemen and benevolent ladies in travelling carriages who appear in the nick of time to distribute rewards or point to a moral." [75]

It was the fourth Mrs. Edgeworth, Frances Beaufort, who brought drama and poetry to the Edgeworth family. Under her creative influence, the family learned to dramatise Maria´s works. [76] In fact, the fourth family was educated in a very traditional way, with the boys attending boarding school, and the girls acquiring all the social accomplishments of the age. [77]

Darwin, too, reflected somewhat of a bias against poetry for girls, although he was a poet of some renown. He admitted that a love of poetry could be cultivated through reading poetry aloud, but admonished that girls should avoid poetry "over-loaded with metaphors, which with superabundance of ornament injure perspicuity". [78] He also felt that his own poetry such as The Botanic Garden might be too racy for girls, containing as it did, references to the reproduction of plants.

If the curriculum of the Lichfield Circle tended to undervalue the arts, it certainly made up for this omission in its treatment of the sciences. This tendency to stress the scientific studies was very advanced for the day. Female education has traditionally been associated with the humanities, and one can see a reluctance on the part of girls to demand a science-oriented education up to the present day. This tendency has been reduced within the last few years, as career opportunities in the sciences present themselves to women.

The group agreed that a good knowledge of the laws of Nature was essential. Day commented that the education of Tommy Merton´s friend Sukey Simmons was ideal because it had "established the laws of Nature and a small degree of geometry". [79] The Edgeworths were in complete agreement. [80] They noted that all children should be provided an opportunity for scientific experimentation under the supervision of the teacher or their parents, and that they should all undertake collections of fossils, leaves, and other materials from nature. [81] Microscopes were thus considered appropriate gifts for girls. [82]

The study of nature was to be followed by a detailed study of botany and minerology. Beddoes´ garden plots were an integral part of these studies. Chemistry was viewed as an ideal study for girls because it provided variety, required no particular strength, and could be continued during the domestic life of the young lady after her school years were at an end. In fact, the study of chemistry applied so well to the domestic arts, that Maria commented that "a good cook is only an empirical chemist". [83]

Dr. Darwin also advocated the inclusion of scientific studies ranging from civil history to minerology in the program of education of a young lady, although his motives were related less to female intellectual development for its own sake than to the concept of the ideal companion. He maintained that scientific studies may be of advantage "to ladies of the rising generation to acquire an outline of similar knowledge; as they are in future life to become companions; and one of the greatest pleasures received in conversation consists in being reciprocally well understood".[84]

This same opinion concerning scientific studies was held by the Edgeworths, who for all Richard Edgeworth's great interest in science and his enthusiastic, inquiring mind, cautioned young ladies against allowing their quest for knowledge to raise their imaginations "above the taste for necessary occupations",[85] for young ladies who attempted to show that they had acquired a great deal of scientific knowledge became "insupportably tiresome to men of sense and science".[86]

For the most part, the Lichfield Circle preferred female education to be carried out within the home rather than in the boarding schools as they existed. It was their view that the qualities of honesty, respect for others, and love of domestic duties could be best provided by an education imparted by those whose affections were most centrally involved, that is the parents. The Edgeworths wrote that ideal education could be best achieved through affection.

> In families where sincerity has been encouraged by the voice of praise and affection, a generous freedom of conversation and countenance appears, and the young people talk to each other and to their parents without distinction or reserve... these feelings inspire the love of truth. 87

However, that is not to say that the Edgeworths denigrated the value of group education. It must be remembered that in their family of twenty-two children, even domestic education was certainly group education. Certainly, the difficulties of an education provided entirely by a tutor were recognized by Maria, one of which was the lack of socialization experienced by the young lady. Maria focussed on this issue in her portrayal of the characters of Virginia and Clarence in Belinda where she used the character of Clarence in speaking of his unrequited love for Virginia, to comment on the unsatisfactory results of tutoring a girl expressly for the purpose of matrimony. 88 Clarence says:

> I have no right to blame anyone so much as myself. Nothing could be more absurd than my scheme of educating a woman in solitude, to make her fit for society... I might have foreseen that Virginia would consider me her tutor, her father, not as her lover, or her husband; she could for me feel nothing but gratitude. 89

Joseph Priestley too agreed with the notion of group education, citing it as less inclined to promote arrogance. Although he was speaking specifically of boys, there is little doubt but that his comments would have also applied to girls, in that:

> a child educated privately is always the chief object of attention, and will give himself improper airs of superiority, and of behaving and conversing in a style which cannot fail to give offense. 90

However, although Priestley preferred group education, he feared the lax moral atmosphere in the boarding schools of the day. [91]

Thomas Beddoes agreed with the Edgeworths in preferring home education for young ladies, but his decision was based less on pedagogical theory than on the existence of such unhealthful conditions in the schools.

Only Erasmus Darwin truly advocated the boarding school as an appropriate educational experience for girls. Although his comments on the difficulties experienced by some girls in schools were intended as criticism of the conditions which did in fact exist, he viewed group education as a means by which the acculturation process could be achieved.

> The facility of knowing others in the daily intercourse of the world is produced by the knowledge of physiognomy, acquired at schools

> in early life; while the passions continue to be impressed on the countenances of children; and which is never so well acquired in private tuition; and thus constitutes one of the great advantages of school-education. 92

Although he was well aware of the inadequacies of most of the boarding schools of the day, his main treatise on female education stood, not only as a critique of the existing practices, but also as a theoretical and practical recommendation for the future. Indeed, Darwin's two illegitimate daughters, the Miss Parkers, for whom the treatise was written, carried out many of the suggestions in their own school for young ladies at Ashbourne in Derbyshire, regarded as one of the finest female educational institutions in England at the time.

When viewed from the perspective of the twentieth century, the Lichfield Circle is disappointing in its somewhat conventional attitudes regarding the role and place of women in their society. However, history must be viewed primarily from a perspective respecting the mores and values of the period in question. In this context, the educational views of the Lichfield Circle are worthy of praise for their advocation of an equal and academic education for girls.

Although their critical comments concerning the boarding schools did not decrease the popularity of this traditional form of female education, when one views the work of the Lichfield Circle with the advantage of hindsight, it is clear that their philosophy of teaching stood at the leading edge of pedagogical theory of the eighteenth century.

Footnotes

1. Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Essays on Practical Education* (3 vols. (London: R. Hunter, and Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1815) 2:214.

2. Peter J. Miller, "The Education of the English Lady, 1770-1820," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1969), p. 79.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 80.

5. Ibid., p. v.

6. Ibid., p. 84.

7. Thomas Beddoes, *Hygeia, Essays Moral and Medical*, (Bristol: R. Phillips, 1806), Essay III, p. 25.

8. Ibid., pp. 23 - 24.

9. Ibid., p. 41.

10. Ibid., p. 15

11. Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), reproduced in facsimile from original (Derby: J. Johnson, 1797) p. 87.

12. Miller, "Education of the English Lady", p. 96.

13. Beddoes, *Hygeia*, Essay III, p. 29.

14. Ibid., p. 27.

15. Ibid., pp. 35 - 36.

16. Ibid., p. 34.

17. Ibid., p. 27.

18. Darwin, *Conduct of Female Education*, p. 104.

19. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 28.

20. Ibid., p. 23.

21. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 105.

22. Ibid., p. 71.

23. Ibid. p. 72.

24. Ibid., p. 73.

25. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 11.

26. Ibid., pp. 42 - 43.

27. Ibid., p. 45.

28. Ibid., p. 46.

29. Ibid., p. 45.

30. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 68.

31. Ibid., p. 69.

32. Miller, "Education of the English Lady", p. 84.

33. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:149.

34. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 58.

35. Ibid., pp. 57 - 58.

36. Ibid., p. 52.

37. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Essays on Professional Education (London: J. Johnson, 1809), p. 14.

38. Ibid., p. 18.

39. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 61,

40. Ibid., p. 67.

41. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 76.

42. Ibid., p. 13.

43. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 17.

44. Ibid., p. 19.

45. Isabel Clarke, Maria Edgeworth (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1949), p. 30.

46. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 78.

47. Ibid., p. 89.

48. Ibid., p. 87.

49. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:294.

50. Ibid., p. 323.

51. Ibid., pp. 312 - 313.

52. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 89.

53. Ibid., p. 89.

54. Ibid., p. 91.

55. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 1:337.

56. Ibid., 2:213.

57. Ibid., 2:212.

58. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 43.

59. Thomas Day, The History of Sandford and Merton, 3 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), reproduced in facsimile from original (London: J. Stockdale, 1783), 3:205.

60. Beddoes, Hygeia, Essay III, p. 71.

61. Ibid., p. 68.

62. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:213.

63. Maria Edgeworth, Letters to Literary Ladies (Georgetown: Joseph Mulligan, 1810), p. 29.

64. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 17.

65. Day, Sandford and Merton, 2:228.

66. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, pp. 18-19..

67. Ibid., p. 15.

68. Ibid., p. 29.

69. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:401.

70. Clarke, Maria Edgeworth, p. 115.

71. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 20.

72. Ibid., p. 23.

73. Ibid.

74. Joseph Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education (Bath: R. Cruttwell, for J. Johnson, 1778), p. 84.

75. Clarke, Maria Edgeworth, p. 35.

76. Ibid., p. 53.

77. Ibid., p. 48 ff.

78. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 39.

79. Day, Sandford and Merton, 2:227.

80. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:214.

81. Ibid., 1:38.

82. Ibid., 1:40.

83. Edgeworth, Letters to Literary Ladies, p. 40.

84. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 45.

85. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2:212.

86. Ibid., 2:214.

87. Ibid., 1:270 - 271.

88. After two ill-fated love affairs, first with the sister of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and then with Honora Sneyd, Thomas Day determined to raise the ideal wife for himself. He managed to adopt two young foundling girls, Lucretia and Sabrina, intending to educate the girls in the Rousseauean style for one year. After this time, he would keep the one he deemed the most suitable as a bride, and would apprentice the other one in some respectable trade. It was Sabrina Sydney whom he determined would make the better wife, but after several attempts to transform her into the ideal Sophie, Day gave up all efforts in this direction, and Sabrina ended up marrying Richard Bicknell, who had been the director of the foundling home where she had been a resident. Day did honour his end of the bargain, in that all financial commitments to the girls were met, and Sabrina was left an endowment from Day´s will. See Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 2 vols. (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969), reproduced in facsimile from original (London: R. Hunter, and Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 1820), p. 215 ff for a further description of Day´s efforts to educate these rather intractable young ladies.

89. Maria Edgeworth, Belinda, 2 vols. (London: Whittingham & Rowland, 1810), 2:236.

90. Priestley, Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education, p. 48.

91. Ibid., p. 50.

92. Darwin, Conduct of Female Education, p. 54.

Chapter 6 CONCLUSION

The findings of the research undertaken for this work - that is, the attitudes of the Lichfield Circle to female education in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century - have been presented. However, a summation and general conclusions are appropriate.

The second chapter of the research provided a brief biographical sketch of each member of the Lichfield Circle, in order to indicate that the members of the Circle were indeed influential and well known in eighteenth century England. The scientific discoveries and poetic endeavours of Erasmus Darwin were equalled in fame by his skill as a physician. Richard Lovell Edgeworth displayed an equally enquiring mind in his inventions as well as his treatises on the education of children. His daughter Maria rose to acclaim, not only for her co-authorship with her father of Practical Education, but as a well-established literary figure in her own right. Thomas Day wrote moral tales which were intended as a guide for education. His life was exemplary of the doctrines he advocated. Joseph Priestley, besides his discoveries in chemical and physical science, produced a small tract on education. His political radicalism in a time of conservatism was sufficiently well known for him to be driven from his homeland by mob violence. Thomas Beddoes, too, made contributions to the field of medical science, and also published a major work, Hygeia, in which he explored the connection between educational practices and female health.

It was significant for the purpose of the study to describe in some detail the relative political radicalism of the group. The members of the Lichfield Circle were certainly on the left concerning the great political issues of the late eighteenth century. They stood in favour of the American colonies in the War of Independence. They wrote articles defending the rights of the citizen in the French Revolution. They were bitterly opposed to the notion of slavery. Neither did they fear censure by society regarding their personal lifestyles.

The Lichfield Circle professed a dedication to the precepts of Reason and Science; a natural assumption, therefore, might be to attribute to them similar "advanced" or "progressive" attitudes regarding women. To discover whether this was, indeed, the case, Chapter three contained a detailed discussion of the attitudes of the Lichfield Circle to women, their conceptualization of the ideal woman, and her appropriate role in society. Despite the previously indicated progressive attitudes of the group politically and socially, some inconsistency was discovered in their attitudes toward women. The Lichfield Circle appear to have held the view of women which predominated in the eighteenth century. They viewed, therefore, women almost exclusively as wives and mothers.

It was noted, however, that the Lichfield Circle, although they did not advocate education for the purposes of creating "career women", (indeed, this notion would have been completely against their interpretation of the dictates of Nature), they were ahead of many of their time in that they advocated a more academic education for girls. It was their view that a well-educated woman would be more content, be a more pleasing companion to her husband, and fulfill more expertly her duties as a mother and teacher for her children.

It is entirely possible, that, although the views of the Lichfield Circle were conservative when compared with the Radical-Feminist views of women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, theirs may well have been the more plausible of the two opinions, given the social realities of the eighteenth century. There is little doubt that the views of the Radical-Feminists were ahead of their time. It is equally true that the perceptions of women held by middle-of-the-road educators such as the Lichfield Circle presented a picture of women which was a necessary stage in the evolutionary process of female emancipation. At any rate, it is a fact that, while the works of the Radical-Feminists were vilified in the conservative, reactionary climate of the years 1794 to 1815, during this time and even later, the works of the Lichfield Circle were, to a great extent, the definitive word on the education of girls.

A degree of ambivalence is certainly present in the attitude of the Lichfield Circle towards women and their appropriate role in society. On the one hand, they recommended a good education for girls, but on the other hand, they admonished that this education should ideally be used only in the home for the convenience of the family. They condemned the widely-accepted custom of social accomplishments as the mainstay of female education but, conversely, were prompted to write a defence of the situation, in recognition of the reality of the hours of enforced leisure endured by upper and middle class women. The members of the group recommended an education in which fresh air, exercise and healthful food play a part; yet, disappointingly, they insisted that many physical activities such as skating and running were unsuitable for girls. It would appear that their rationality and commitment to empiricism regarding the education of females were sometimes clouded by their male prejudices.

The fact that the group was primarily male is no doubt one of the factors leading to their attitudes regarding women. Although Maria Edgeworth made significant contributions to the field of female education, and, despite the fact that she had a very successful literary career, she was dominated by her father. His views were her views and, if she felt any resentment, it was well concealed. The ambivalence on the part of the Lichfield Circle where women´s issues were concerned may well have been simply a fear of any change in the structure of the family which would serve to enhance the power base of women. Any power and influence taken by women would ultimately be usurped from the role of the male.

Lawrence Stone´s theory regarding the advent of the eighteenth century companionate marriage may well provide another explanation. It may be that this kind of family relationship, in which a mother role was so vital, was an absolutely essential milestone on the road to the evolution of the nuclear family. The solid and secure emotional bonding of the nuclear family may have been a necessary requirement to sever completely the Old World extended family. If this were so, then the Lichfield Circle's reluctance to see women abandon a role which society viewed as vital is understandable, and in this respect, can be seen as "progressive" rather than "reactionary".

Although the Lichfield Circle may have demonstrated a certain ambivalence in their attitudes toward women, there is no doubt that they were advanced for their day in terms of the education they deemed appropriate for girls. As discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters of this work, they condemned the education which was typically made available to girls. Not only did female education, consisting as it did of the womanly accomplishments, fail to educate girls academically; but it was also morally corrupting in that it led girls to assume that marriage was the ultimate goal of their existence without paying sufficient attention to the duties and responsibilities incumbent with marriage. It also led to the moral laxity of indolence which in turn led to ennui.

The Lichfield educational theorists suggested a more academic education. They advocated learning through exploration and the use of visual teaching aids. Science and experimentation were encouraged. Collections of eggs, shells, butterflies, rocks, and flowers were viewed as an appropriate way of studying Nature. Mathematics, including geometry and algebra, was recommended as good training for the mind. They criticised the common practice of rote learning as ineffective and boring. All members of the Lichfield Circle but especially the Edgeworths viewed good education as being what was both practical and practicable.

Not only were their methods to be more practical; they were also to be more humane. Both Darwin and Beddoes criticised the boarding schools for the undesirable conditions under which young ladies lived. Among these were crowding, lack of heat, and insufficient nutrition. Many schools of the age still placed girls in stocks, backboards, or stays to trim and straighten the figure. The Lichfield Circle viewed these customs not only as useless but cruel. Darwin's treatise on boarding school education stands as a particularly advanced work on the ideal physical setting of schools. Including plans for suitable ventilation and recommendations regarding the appropriate diet and exercise for young ladies, his work was indicative of a spirit which was both kindly and concerned.

And yet, in spite of the repeated call for change in female education as it was practiced in the late eighteenth century, it appears that change was not forthcoming for another hundred years. Members of the Lichfield Circle were not alone in condemning the traditional female education as useless and morally corrupting; their calls were joined by other writers as widely divergent in their views as the Evangelicals and Utilitarians. Despite the fact that these other intellectual movements were spurred by widely diverse motivations, they too agreed with the Circle that the practice of education as it was carried out was failing to meet the goal of moulding the middle to upper class girl into the ideal wife and mother.

The reasons for the failure of families and schools to comply with what they accepted as being sound advice must be found in the belief by the middle class that the "education of a lady" was a means to social mobility for daughters. Just as the Lichfield Circle themselves demonstrated an ambivalence in their attitudes toward women, middle class society, too, demonstrated an ambivalence toward what theorists insisted was the most appropriate, moral education for their daughters. And if there was a program of studies intended to make daughters more appealing on the marriage market, then that was education worthy of pursuing.

Although the works of the Lichfield Circle are read today primarily for the purposes of pedagogical research by students of the history of education, they were an important influence in the eighteenth century. The degree of renown in which the authors were held is sound evidence of the fact that they were widely read. Despite the fact that their works failed to stimulate significant change in the actual practice of female education, they provided sound pedagogical theory, combining a spirit of kindliness and humanity in dealing with girls. Although the members of the Lichfield Circle were not progressive in their attitudes toward women in general, they did represent a great advance in thinking in the theoretical and practical pedagogy they recommended regarding female education. For this, they can be counted among the significant pedagogical figures of the eighteenth century.

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